MARVEL COMICS
Fantastic Four
THE TRIAL OF GALACTUS
BY JOHN BYRNE

Fantastic Four®

THE TRIAL OF GALACTUS

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INTRODUCTION

In 1966 Stan Lee and Jack Kirby created a character like none who had ever appeared before in the annals of comic book fantasy.

Not that Stan and Jack had exactly been *dozing* before that. In the previous five years they had combined their talents to completely redefine what American comic books were all about. They had created, in stunning short order, the Fantastic Four, the Incredible Hulk, the Mighty Thor, Iron Man, Ant-Man, and, in short, a whole *universe* of new and amazing characters.

They also created themselves a slight problem; when every issue has to be bigger, better, more spectacular than the last, how do you keep outdoing yourself, month after month? Especially when your latest effort was nothing less than the creation of an entire, hidden *race* of super-powered beings (the mysterious Inhumans).

Well, legend has it that Stan's instructions to Jack as to what to do next were astonishingly simple and to the point. Supposedly he sent Jack a "plot" which consisted of nothing more or less than *four words:* "Have them fight God."

And so, on a rooftop above Manhattan, we first met *Galactus!*

Then, in 1980, it became my delightful task to chronicle the adventures of the Fantastic Four, and one of the first things I wanted to do was a Galactus story of my very own. The challenge handed me by the editorial level at Marvel, however, was not slight; restore Galactus to his former glories. Expunge the pettiness that had wheedled its way into later portrayals of the character. Reestablish the being Stan and Jack had first presented us, fourteen years earlier.

It took quite a while to do it. From early 1982 through the middle of 1984 I worked with several different editors, all of whom receive their due credit elsewhere, in putting together this "Purpose of Galactus" story. Many other adventures wound around the pages that follow, as the F.F. went through their busy lives, battling evils and generally representing the Right Stuff in the Marvel Universe.

To the best of our ability those other tales have been edited out of the single, cohesive representation "of my" Galactus story which you are about to read. Here and there you will find references to some of those stories; places like the Negative Zone get a passing mention, and one character at least makes reference to an F.F. adventure in which she was involved but about which you will here learn, alas, nothing.

The Thing you *will* notice, however, goes through a rather dramatic physical change about halfway through this book. In a storyline begun quite early in my tenure on the F.F.'s title I'd caused Ben Grimm to "regress" to an earlier version of his monstrous form, one whose skin looked less like a dry riverbed and more like dinosaur hide. Subsequently he was changed back to his more traditional "rocky" form, but that sequence is missing here, since it did not involve Galactus, or any of his heralds.

Then, too, the F.F.'s costumes change from blue and black to black and white. This also came out of a story not represented in this volume (although it *is* hinted at; it was in that particular tale that the Vision was injured, and that injury is mentioned here).

All in all, though, an amazing degree of so-called "Marvel Serendipity" seems to have been working on my side as I shifted and deleted pages to put this multi-issue saga into one hopefully digestible lump. Whole sequences dropped away, and yet the events which bracketed them often fit together so seamlessly no rewriting was necessary. Where rewriting *was* done, the original mood and intent has been scrupulously maintained.

So . . . enjoy.

John Byrne

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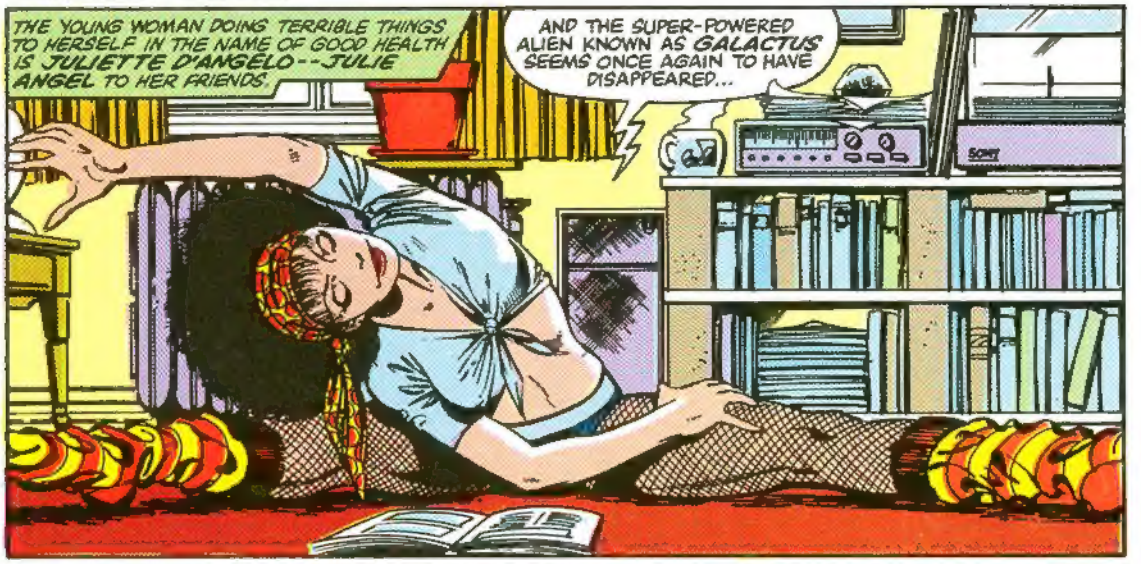
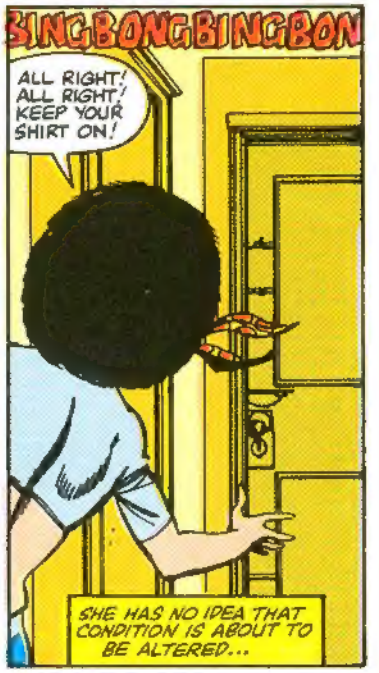
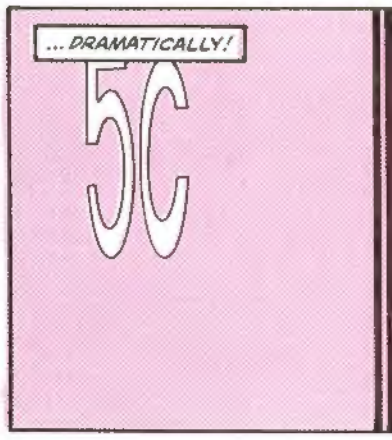
PART ONE


THE YOUNG WOMAN DOING TERRIBLE THINGS TO HERSELF IN THE NAME OF GOOD HEALTH IS JULIETTE D'ANGELO--JULIE ANGEL TO HER FRIENDS.
AND THE SUPER-POWERED ALIEN KNOWN AS GALACTUS SEEMS ONCE AGAIN TO HAVE DISAPPEARED...
SONY

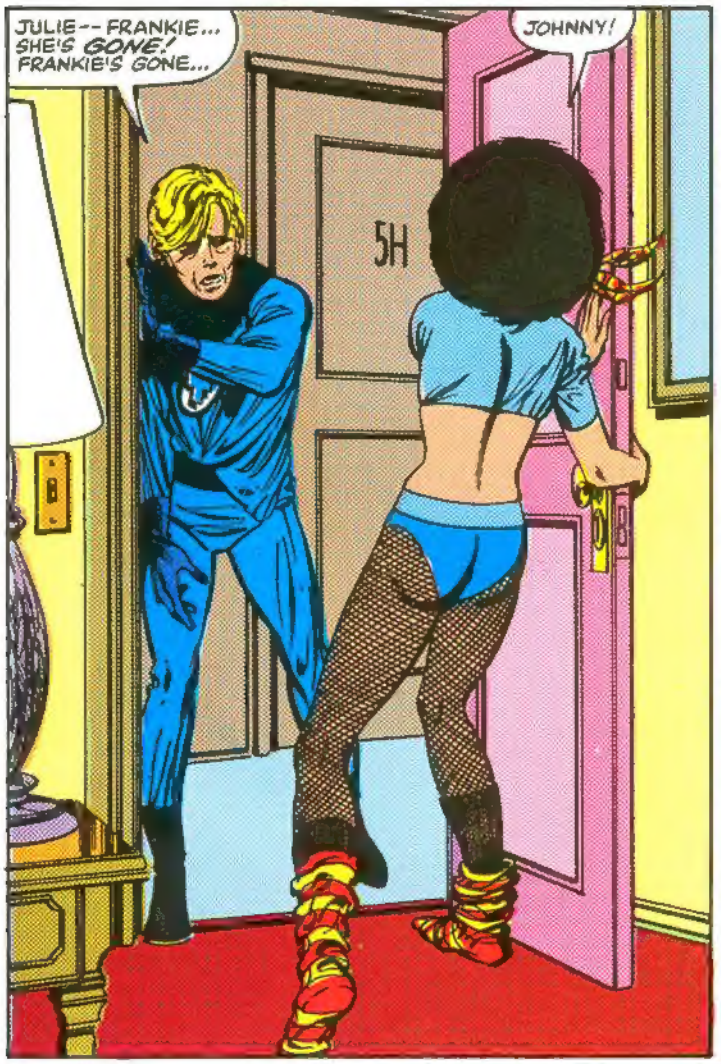
THOSE FRIENDS HAVE MOSTLY TENDED TO BE STUDENTS AND WOULD-BE-ACTORS, ALTHOUGH TWO OF THEIR NUMBER ARE RATHER SPECIAL...
FRANKIE RAYE, JULIE'S ERST-WHILE ROOMMATE, WHO RECENTLY DISCOVERED HERSELF TO HAVE FLAMING POWERS, AND JOHNNY STORM, THE HUMAN TORCH.

JULIE HAS NOT HEARD FROM EITHER IN ALMOST A WEEK. NOT SINCE THE NIGHT OF STRANGE LIGHTS IN THE SKY AND A CITY-WIDE BLACKOUT.
BING BONG
NUTS!

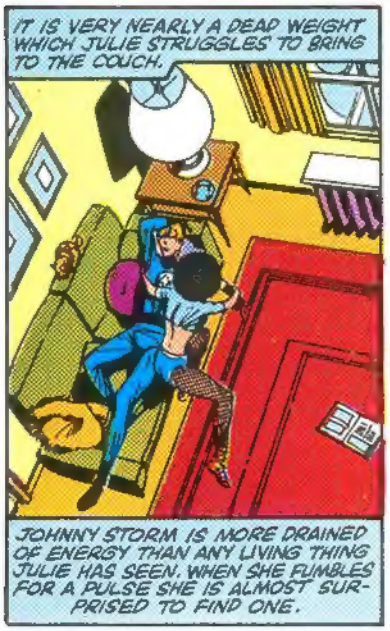

SINGBONGBINGBON
ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT! KEEP YOUR SHIRT ON!
SHE HAS NO IDEA THAT CONDITION IS ABOUT TO BE ALTERED...


...DRAMATICALLY!
5C

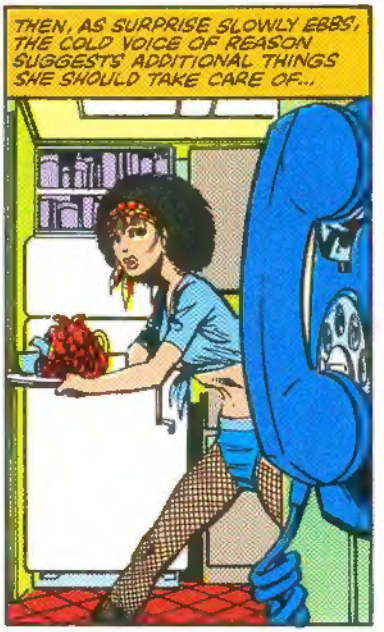
YES, WHAT DO YOU...
OH, GOLLY!

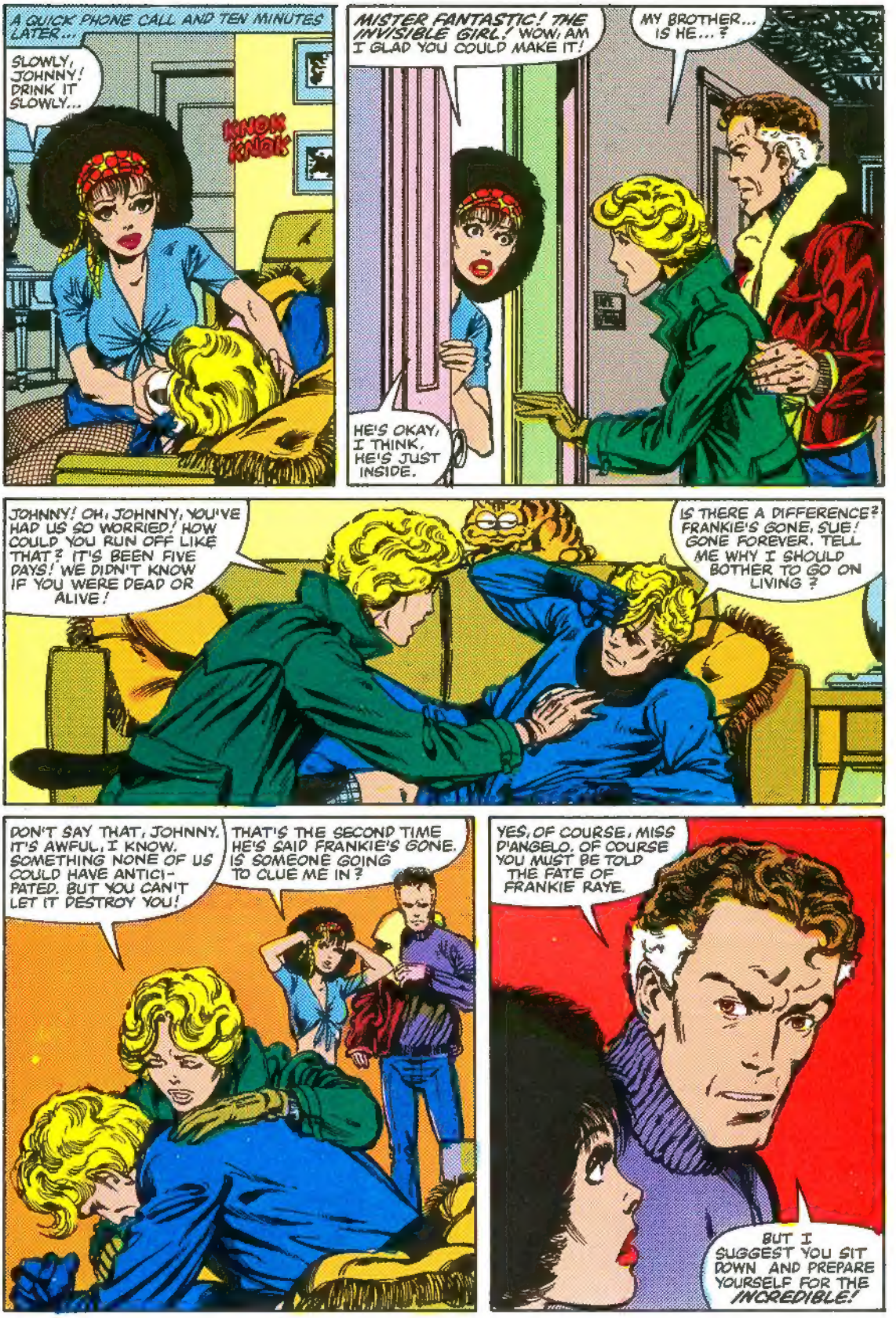

JULIE-- FRANKIE... SHE'S GONE! FRANKIE'S GONE...
JOHNNY!
5H

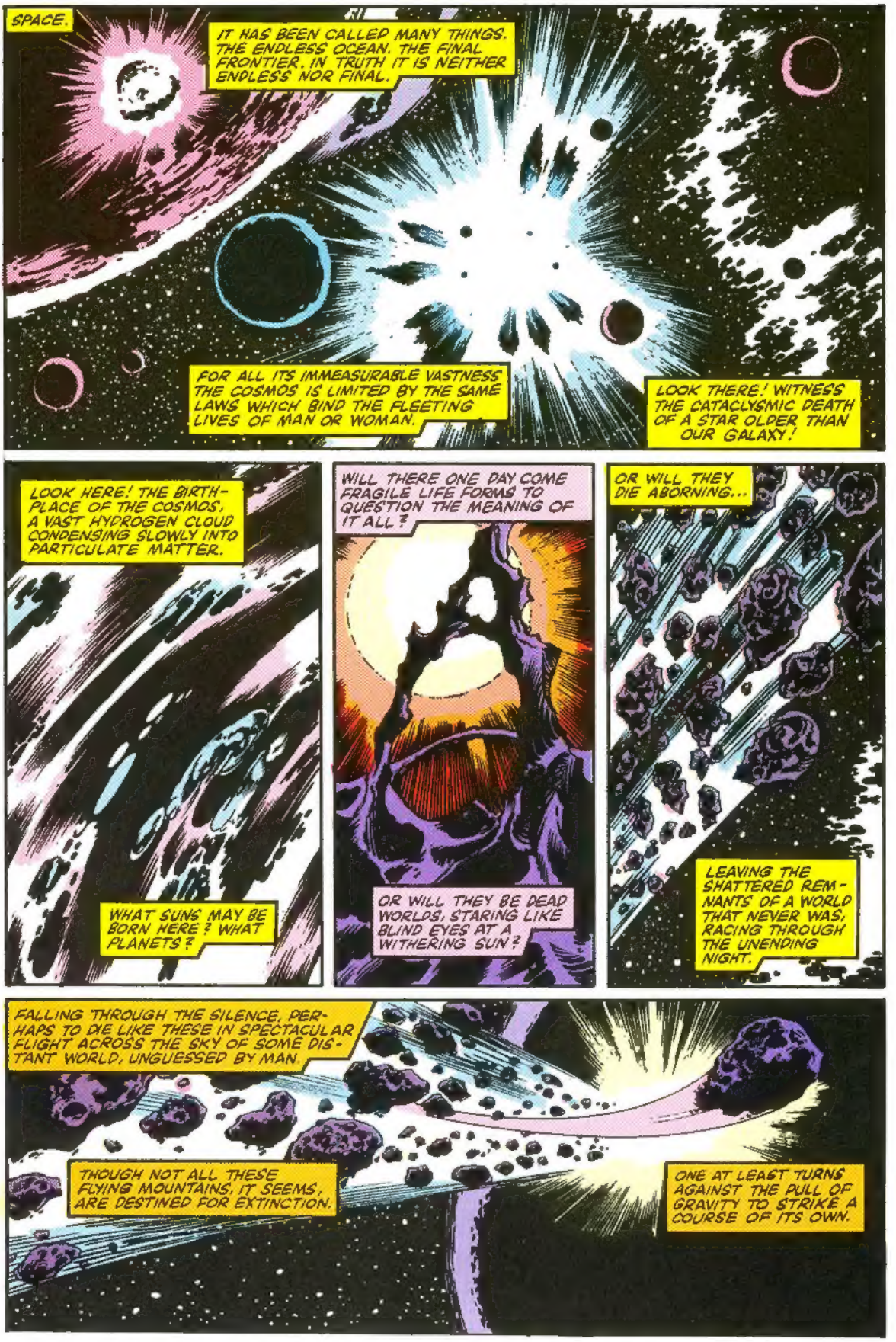
THERE IS TIME ONLY FOR A SHOCKED LEAP OF THE HEART, AND THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR PITCHES FORWARD LIKE A MARIONETTE WHOSE STRINGS ARE CUT.


IT IS VERY NEARLY A DEAD WEIGHT WHICH JULIE STRUGGLES TO BRING TO THE COUCH.
JOHNNY STORM IS MORE DRAINED OF ENERGY THAN ANY LIVING THING JULIE HAS SEEN. WHEN SHE FUMBLES FOR A PULSE SHE IS ALMOST SURPRISED TO FIND ONE.

HER TRAINING IN THE HEALING ARTS AMOUNTS TO NO MORE THAN A BRIEF FIRST-AID COURSE NEARLY TEN YEARS AGO, BUT SHE KNOWS SHOCK AND EXHAUSTION WHEN SHE SEES THEM.
WITHIN MINUTES, SHE HAS BREWED A POT OF HOT TEA...


THEN, AS SURPRISE SLOWLY EBBS, THE COLD VOICE OF REASON SUGGESTS ADDITIONAL THINGS SHE SHOULD TAKE CARE OF...


A QUICK PHONE CALL AND TEN MINUTES LATER...
SLOWLY, JOHNNY! DRINK IT SLOWLY...
KNOK KNOK
MISTER FANTASTIC! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! WOW, AM I GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT!
MY BROTHER... IS HE...?
HE'S OKAY, I THINK, HE'S JUST INSIDE.
JOHNNY! OH, JOHNNY, YOU'VE HAD US SO WORRIED! HOW COULD YOU RUN OFF LIKE THAT? IT'S BEEN FIVE DAYS! WE DIDN'T KNOW IF YOU WERE DEAD OR ALIVE!
IS THERE A DIFFERENCE? FRANKIE'S GONE, SUE! GONE FOREVER. TELL ME WHY I SHOULD BOTHER TO GO ON LIVING?
DON'T SAY THAT, JOHNNY. IT'S AWFUL, I KNOW. SOMETHING NONE OF US COULD HAVE ANTICIPATED. BUT YOU CAN'T LET IT DESTROY YOU!
THAT'S THE SECOND TIME HE'S SAID FRANKIE'S GONE. IS SOMEONE GOING TO CLUE ME IN?
YES, OF COURSE, MISS D'ANGELO. OF COURSE YOU MUST BE TOLD THE FATE OF FRANKIE RAYE.
BUT I SUGGEST YOU SIT DOWN AND PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE INCREDIBLE!


SPACE.
IT HAS BEEN CALLED MANY THINGS. THE ENDLESS OCEAN. THE FINAL FRONTIER. IN TRUTH IT IS NEITHER ENDLESS NOR FINAL.
FOR ALL ITS IMMEASURABLE VASTNESS THE COSMOS IS LIMITED BY THE SAME LAWS WHICH BIND THE FLEETING LIVES OF MAN OR WOMAN.
LOOK THERE! WITNESS THE CATACLYSMIC DEATH OF A STAR OLDER THAN OUR GALAXY!
LOOK HERE! THE BIRTH-PLACE OF THE COSMOS, A VAST HYDROGEN CLOUD CONDENSING SLOWLY INTO PARTICULATE MATTER.
WHAT SUNS MAY BE BORN HERE? WHAT PLANETS?
WILL THERE ONE DAY COME FRAGILE LIFE FORMS TO QUESTION THE MEANING OF IT ALL?
OR WILL THEY BE DEAD WORLDS, STARING LIKE BLIND EYES AT A WITHERING SUN?
OR WILL THEY DIE ABORNING...
LEAVING THE SHATTERED REM-NANTS OF A WORLD THAT NEVER WAS, RACING THROUGH THE UNENDING NIGHT.
FALLING THROUGH THE SILENCE, PER-HAPS TO DIE LIKE THESE IN SPECTACULAR FLIGHT ACROSS THE SKY OF SOME DIS-TANT WORLD, UNGUESSED BY MAN.
THOUGH NOT ALL THESE FLYING MOUNTAINS, IT SEEMS, ARE DESTINED FOR EXTINCTION.
ONE AT LEAST TURNS AGAINST THE PULL OF GRAVITY TO STRIKE A COURSE OF ITS OWN.

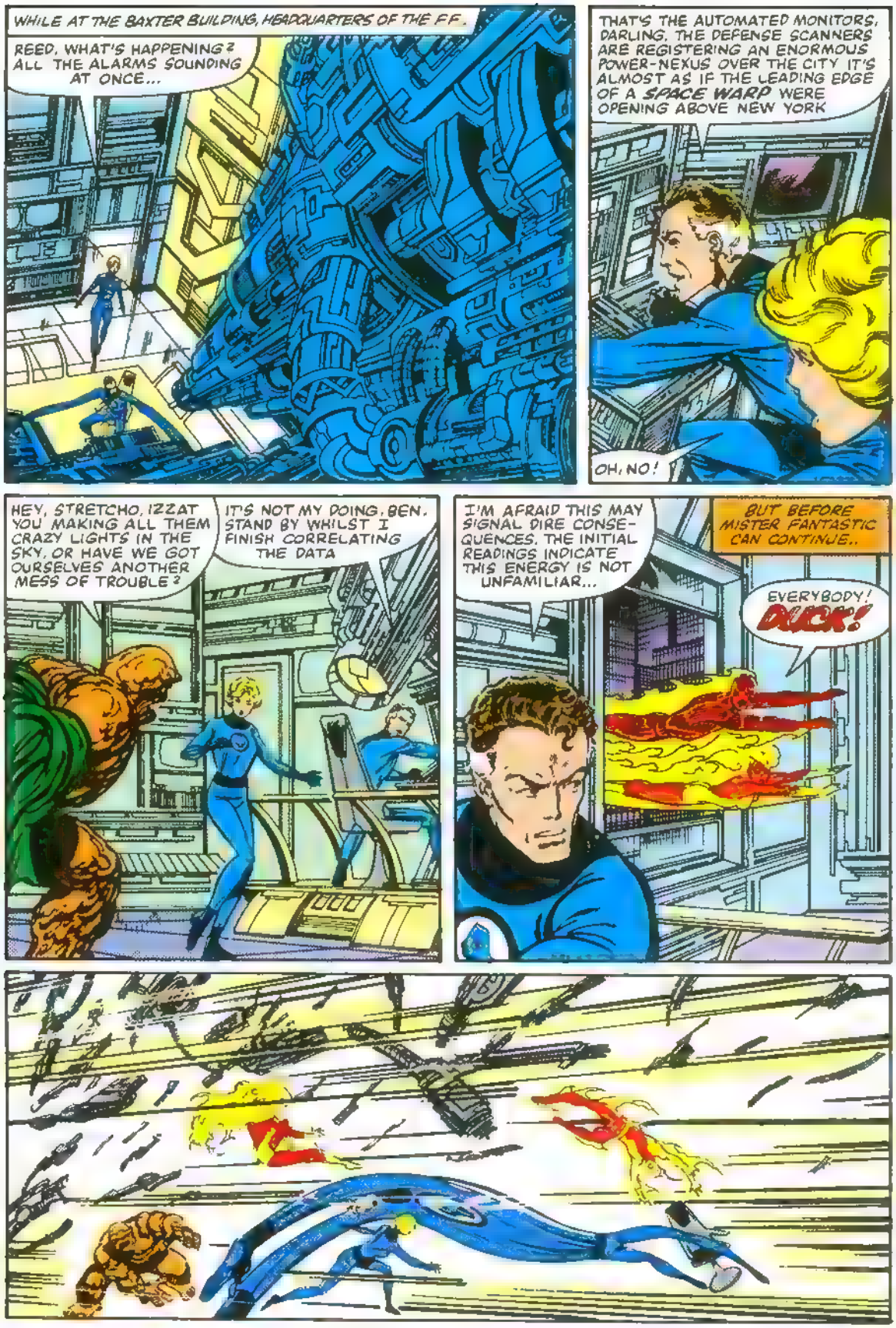
ELSEWHERE...
THE NIGHT AIR IS CHILL AND UNFRIENDLY. MOST PEOPLE ARE CONTENT TO REMAIN AT HOME THIS EVENING.
MOST, BUT NOT ALL.
CERTAINLY NOT ALL...
HEY, OL' MAN, WHATCHA DOIN' IN THE PARK ALL BY YERSELF?
YEAH, DON'TCHA KNOW IT AIN'T SAFE?
MAYBE WE SHOULD SHOW HIM, HUH, ANGIE?
BACK OFF, YOU PUNKS. I AIN'T IN NO MOOD TA PLAY GAMES WITH THE LIKES OF YOU!
OOH OOH OOH. I'M SOOOO SCARED.
WE BETTER WATCH OUT, GUYS. LOOKS LIKE WE FOUND OURSELVES A SUPER HERO.
HEY, LET'S SEE WHICH ONE IT...
...IS...
MY HAT!
HOLY SPIT! IT'S SOME KINDA MONSTER!
THAT AIN'T JUST A MONSTER! THAT'S THE THING!
NEVER MIND WHO IT IS, ROACH. RUN!

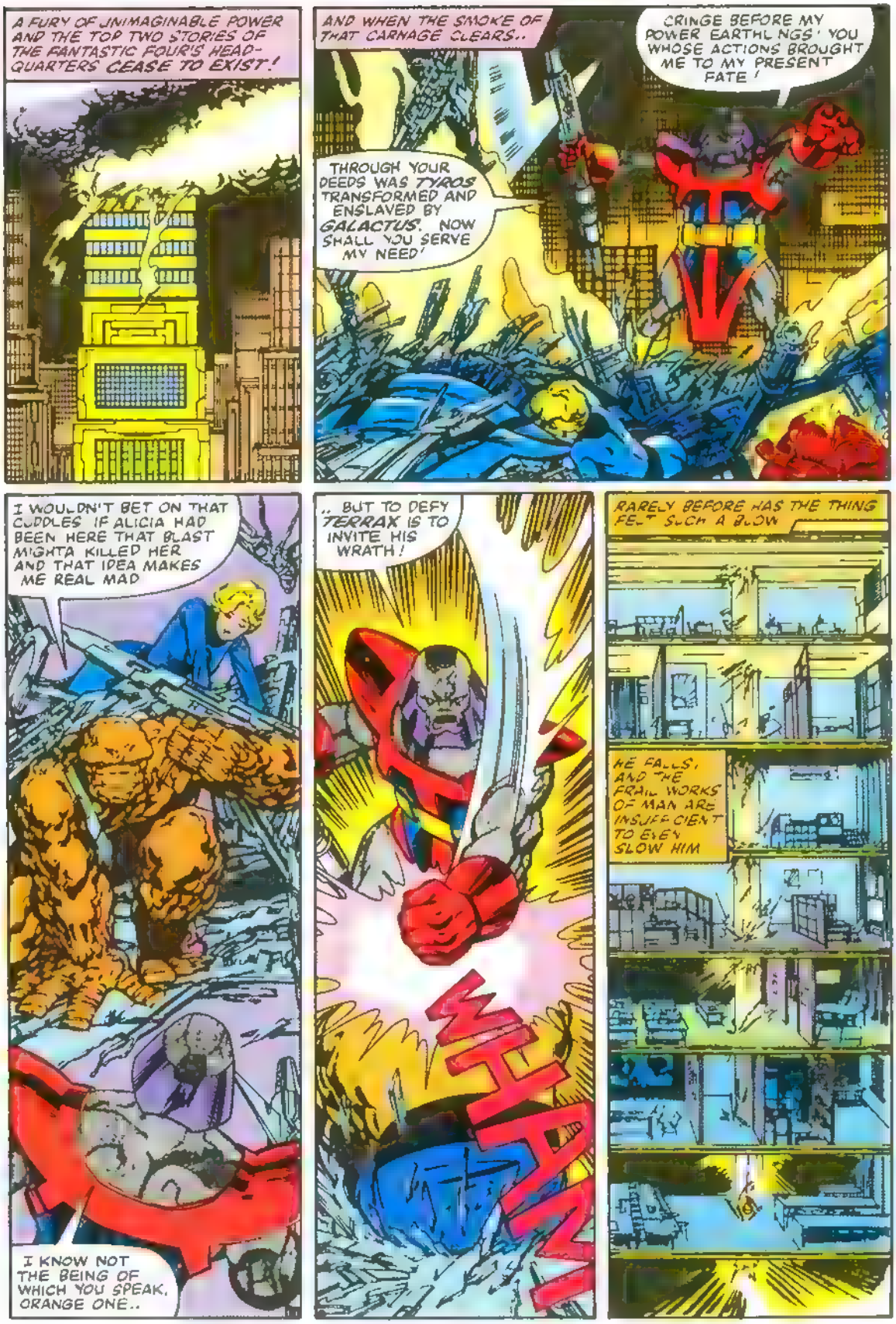
GO AHEAD AND RUN, BOZOS! YOU AIN'T GONNA GET VERY FAR!
NOT SO LONG AS MRS. GRIMM'S FAVORITE SON CAN DISH UP A SNOWBALL SPECIAL...
SOME OF THE MIGHTIEST MUSCLES ON EARTH COIL AND RELEASE...
AND A SIMPLE SNOWBALL BECOMES A THUNDERING JUGGERNAUT...
HALP!
ABRUPTLY CURTAILING THE PLANS OF FIVE WOULD-BE MUGGERS.
WHOOF!
AND, A FEW MOMENTS LATER...
NOW YOU BOYS BE GOOD LITTLE HOODLUMS AND WAIT RIGHT HERE WHILE I GO FIND A COP, OKAY?
BEN?
ALICIA! HOW'D YOU FIND ME OUT HERE IN THE MIDDLE OF CENTRAL PARK?
THIS POLICE OFFICER HELPED ME. I WAS WORRIED WHEN YOU LEFT MY STUDIO SO ABRUPTLY.

I DIDN'T MEAN TA WORRY YA, BABE. I WUZ JUST REMEMBERIN' HOW GOOD WE HAD IT IN "LIDDLE-VILLE"*, AND I GUESS IT GOT TA BE TOO MUCH FER ME.
ER... IF EVERYTHING IS ALL RIGHT I'LL BE MOVING ALONG NOW, MISS MASTERS.
* BEN AND ALICIA WERE GIVEN A TASTE OF NORMAL LIFE AS PART OF A PLOT BY DOCTOR DOOM -- SALIGRU?
EVERYTHING'S FINE, PAL. THANKS FER BRINGING MY LADY TO ME.
MY PLEASURE, MR. GRIMM.
HARD TO BELIEVE SOMETIMES THAT A SCULPTRESS AS TALENTED AS ALICIA MASTERS WOULD HOOK UP WITH THE THING.
IS IT REALLY ONLY BECAUSE SHE'S BLIND AND CAN'T SEE HIM?
LEAVING THE OFFICER TO PONDER A QUESTION NOT UNLIKE THOSE WHICH HAVE RECENTLY TROUBLED THE THING, LET'S LOOK IN ON SOME MORE MEMBERS OF OUR CAST...
HOW MUCH FURTHER, FRANKIE? YOU SAID IT WAS AN OUT-OF-THE-WAY THEATRE...
...BUT IF WE WERE ANY MORE OFF-BROADWAY WE'D BE IN POUGHKEEPSIE.
IT'S JUST AROUND THAT CORNER!
ANYWAY, LET'S NOT HAVE ANY MORE FUSS. IT WAS YOUR IDEA TO WALK INSTEAD OF FLYING HERE UNDER OUR OWN POWER.
THAT WAS BEFORE I KNEW THE WALK WOULD TURN INTO A FORCED MARCH. MAYBE I...
HEY, LOOK WHERE WE ARE!
I ALMOST DIDN'T RECOGNIZE IT WITH ALL THE URBAN RENEWAL THAT'S BEEN GOING ON IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD, BUT THAT BOARDED-UP BROWNSTONE IS SLIGHTLY SIGNIFICANT.
THAT USED TO BE THE FLOPHOUSE WHERE I FOUND THE SUB-MARINER!
THE HUMAN TORCH HAS ONLY A MOMENT TO REMINISCE, HOWEVER, AS...
THERE IT IS, JOHNNY.
THEATRE

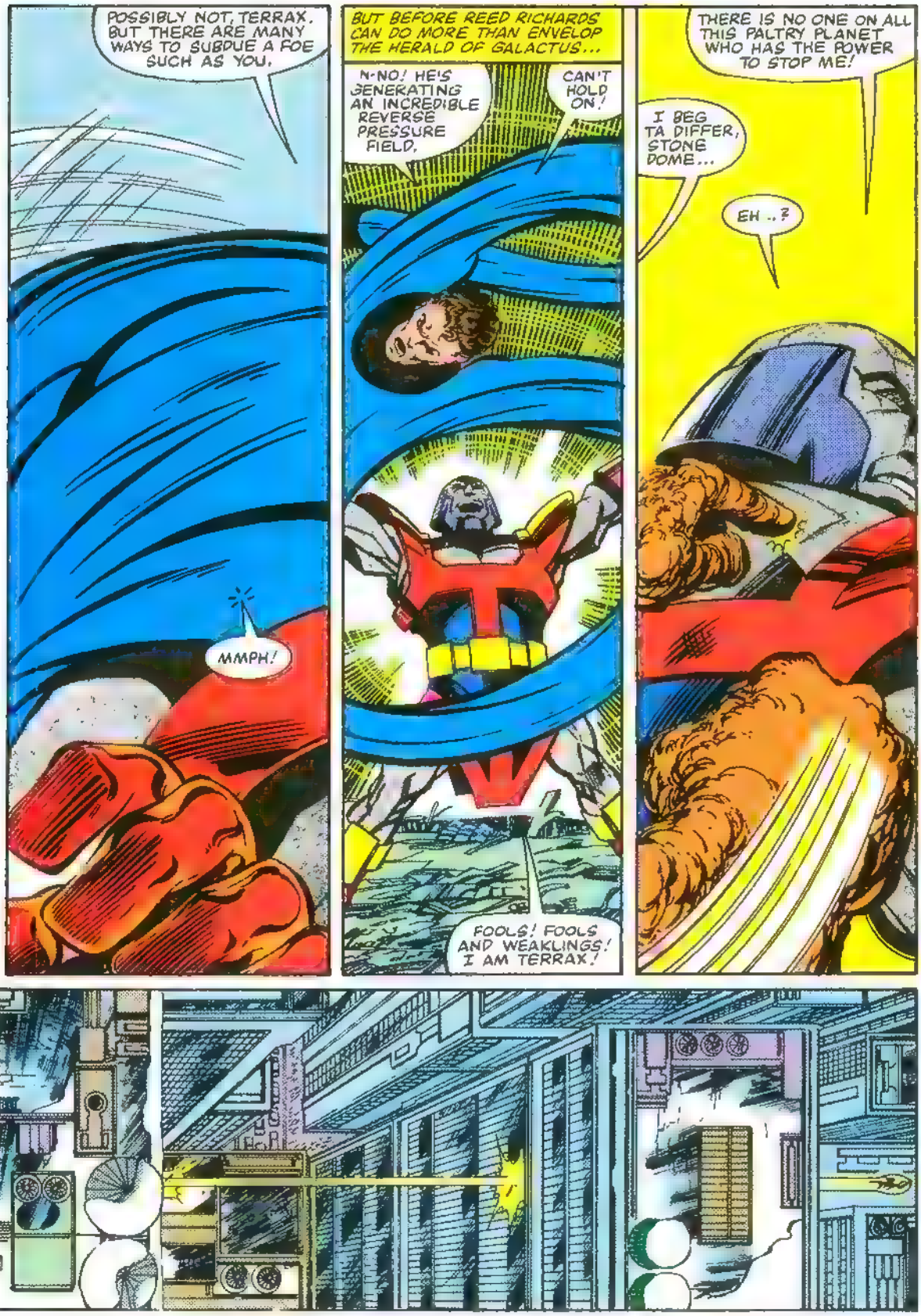
THIS IS A THEATRE - SMELLS MORE LIKE AN ITALIAN RESTAURANT!
OH, EXCUSE ME, I'M FRANKIE RAYE AND THIS IS JOHNNY STORM...
JULIE'S FRIENDS? YEAH, SHE SAID YOU'D BE DROPPING BY!
YOU'LL HAVE TO WAIT A FEW MINUTES. SHE'S JUST RUNNING THROUGH A SCENE WITH GARTH
"MANY DAYS HAVE PASSED WITHOUT A WORD BETWEEN US.
"WHY DO YOU DENY THE TRUTH WE BOTH KNOW?"
"TRUTH? WHAT TRUTH? I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN."
"YES, YOU DO.
"IN MY TRIBE WE DON'T PLAY GAMES WITH OUR HEARTS..."
STOP!
FER CRYIN' OUT LOUD, GARTH. IS IS THAT THE BEST YOU CAN GIVE ME? YOU'RE ALL TORN UP INSIDE OVER THIS GIRL AND YOU COME ACROSS LIKE SHE BROKE A LUNCH DATE!
HEY, ACTRESS, GOT A MINUTE FOR YOUR ADORING PUBLIC?
FRANKIE! JOHNNY! GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT, KIDLETS!
SORRY YOU CAME IN ON SUCH A YUCKY SPOT, THOUGH. GARTH'S USUALLY MORE INTO THE CHARACTER, BUT HE'S OFF IN HIS OWN SPACE TONIGHT
NOT LATELY NO.
SO HOW'S THE SUPER HERO GIG, FRANKIE? SAVE ANY UNIVERSES LATELY?

NOTHING, HUH? WELL, THERE GOES MY READER'S DIGEST ARTICLE ON THE MOST FASCINATING PERSON I KNOW I THOUGHT YOU SUPER-FOLK WERE ALWAYS OUT WORLD-SAVING
SO DID I, BUT NO SUCH LUCK SO FAR
JULIE, I HATE TO INTERRUPT, BUT WHY DOES THIS PLACE SMELL LIKE ABOUT FIVE TONS OF LASAGNA?
OH THAT'S "MAMA LEON'S" NEXT DOOR THEIR KITCHEN VENTS THROUGH HERE WE'RE USED TO IT, BUT WE'VE HAD TO GIVE FREE TICKETS TO THEIR WHOLE STAFF TO BE SURE THEY'RE CLOSED OPENING NIGHT.
HEY YOU GUYS, LOOK AT THE SKY!
A SUDDEN SCRAMBLING AS EVERYONE RUSHES OUT INTO THE COLD NIGHT, AND...
JOHNNY, WHAT IS IT? I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT!
ME NEITHER, BABE, BUT WHATEVER IT IS...
IT'S WORTH INVESTIGATING!
FLAME ON!
HEY, WAIT FOR ME!
A BLINDING FLASH OF COMBUSTION AND TWO HUMAN TORCHES STREAK SKYWARD.

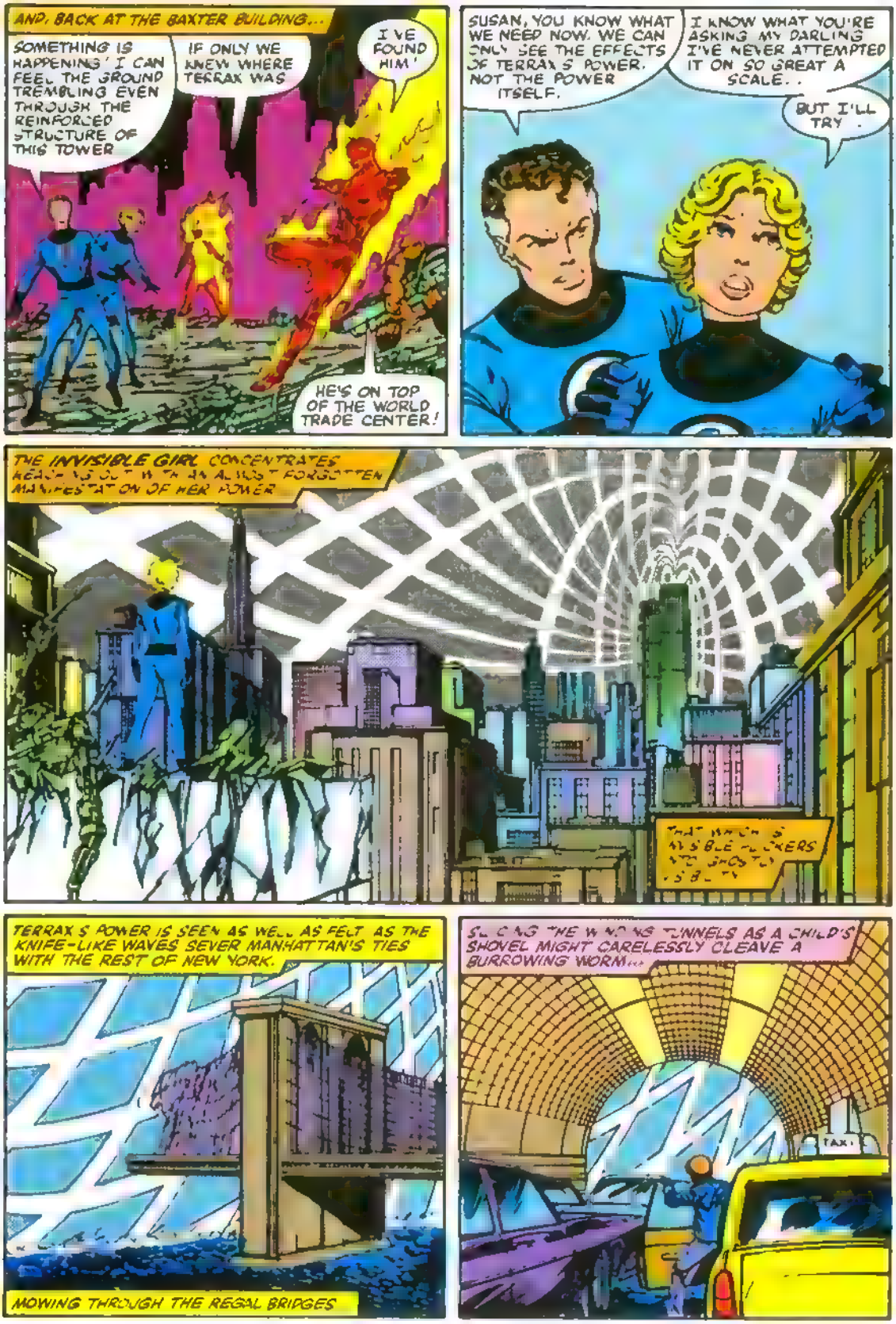

WHILE AT THE BAXTER BUILDING, HEADQUARTERS OF THE F.F.
REED, WHAT'S HAPPENING? ALL THE ALARMS SOUNDING AT ONCE...
THAT'S THE AUTOMATED MONITORS, DARLING. THE DEFENSE SCANNERS ARE REGISTERING AN ENORMOUS POWER-NEXUS OVER THE CITY. IT'S ALMOST AS IF THE LEADING EDGE OF A SPACE WARP WERE OPENING ABOVE NEW YORK
OH, NO!
HEY, STRETCHO, IZZAT YOU MAKING ALL THEM CRAZY LIGHTS IN THE SKY, OR HAVE WE GOT OURSELVES ANOTHER MESS OF TROUBLE?
IT'S NOT MY DOING, BEN. STAND BY WHILST I FINISH CORRELATING THE DATA
I'M AFRAID THIS MAY SIGNAL DIRE CONSEQUENCES. THE INITIAL READINGS INDICATE THIS ENERGY IS NOT UNFAMILIAR...
BUT BEFORE MISTER FANTASTIC CAN CONTINUE..
EVERYBODY! DUCK!

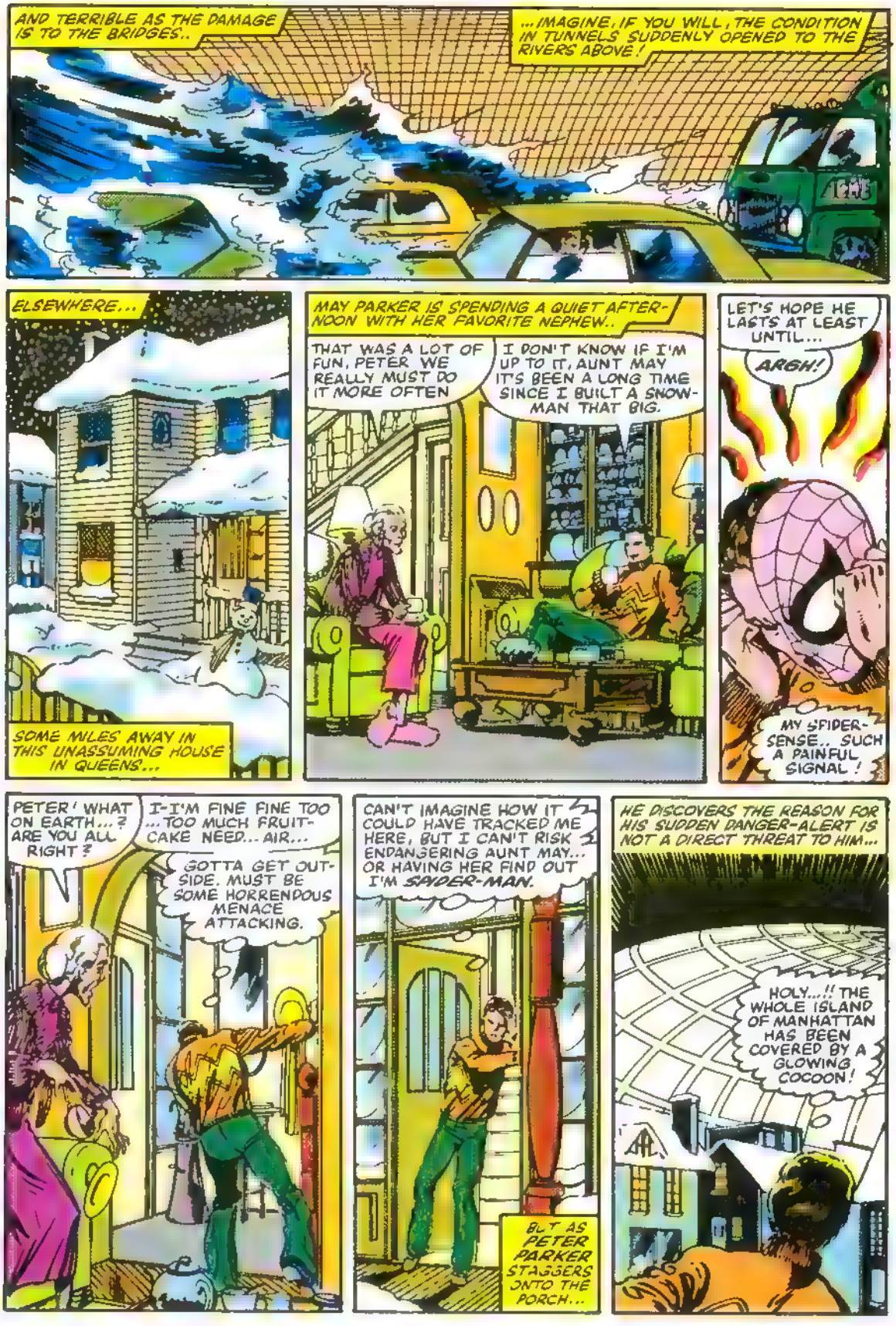

A FURY OF UNIMAGINABLE POWER AND THE TOP TWO STORIES OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S HEAD-QUARTERS CEASE TO EXIST!
AND WHEN THE SMOKE OF THAT CARNAGE CLEARS..
CRINGE BEFORE MY POWER EARTHLINGS! YOU WHOSE ACTIONS BROUGHT ME TO MY PRESENT FATE!
THROUGH YOUR DEEDS WAS TYROS TRANSFORMED AND ENSLAVED BY GALACTUS. NOW SHALL YOU SERVE MY NEED!
I WOULDN'T BET ON THAT CUDDLES IF ALICIA HAD BEEN HERE THAT BLAST MIGHTA KILLED HER AND THAT IDEA MAKES ME REAL MAD
I KNOW NOT THE BEING OF WHICH YOU SPEAK, ORANGE ONE..
.. BUT TO DEFY TERRAX IS TO INVITE HIS WRATH!
WHAM
RARELY BEFORE HAS THE THING FELT SUCH A BLOW
HE FALLS, AND THE FRAIL WORKS OF MAN ARE INSUFFICIENT TO EVEN SLOW HIM

FRANKIE, TRY TO STAY BACK OUT OF THE LINE OF FIRE. YOU'RE NOT READY FOR THIS KIND OF OPPONENT.'
NO ARGU-MENT!
B-BEN! DEAR HEAVEN, HE'S ...GONE!
OKAY, TERRAX, YOU TALK LOUD-LY AND CARRY A BIG STICK, BUT I'VE BEATEN YOU BEFORE, AND I CAN DO IT AGAIN!
FOOLISH STRIPLING!
IT WAS LUCK, NOT SKILL OR POWER WHICH VANQUISHED ME.
THE MIGHTY COSMIC POWERED AXE SWINGS...
UNGH!
YOU SHALL NOT BE SO FORTUNATE A SECOND TIME
SLAM!


POSSIBLY NOT, TERRAX. BUT THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO SUBDUE A FOE SUCH AS YOU.
MMPH!
BUT BEFORE REED RICHARDS CAN DO MORE THAN ENVELOP THE HERALD OF GALACTUS...
N-NO! HE'S GENERATING AN INCREDIBLE REVERSE PRESSURE FIELD.
CAN'T HOLD ON!
FOOLS! FOOLS AND WEAKLINGS! I AM TERRAX!
THERE IS NO ONE ON ALL THIS PALTRY PLANET WHO HAS THE POWER TO STOP ME!
I BEG TA DIFFER, STONE DOME...
EH ..?

ACROSS THE ROOFTOPS OF AN UNSUSPECTING MANHATTAN TERRAX FLIES, COMING AT LAST TO REST ON, AND THROUGH, THE FORTUNATELY EMPTY CAB OF ONE IGGIE KRAMDEN.
IGGIE'S INSURANCE WILL COVER THE DAMAGES...
TAXI
THOUGH HE WILL HAVE SOME SMALL DIFFICULTY EXPLAINING EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED TO HIS TAXI.
ENOUGH OF THESE GAMES
THOSE TWIN TOWERS YONDER THEY WILL PROVIDE A PERFECT VIEW OF THIS ISLAND
THUS SHALL I TRANSPORT MYSELF TO THEM
FOR ALL THAT IS ROCK AND EARTH IS MINE TO COMMAND!
AND BY THE FULL FORCE OF THAT POWER SHALL I BIND THE FANTASTIC FOUR TO MY WILL.
EVEN AS GALACTUS SOUGHT TO BIND ME TO HIS
HE SETTLES ATOP ONE OF THE TALLEST BUILDINGS IN THE WORLD...
FOR A MOMENT HE STANDS STILL AS IF LISTENING..
LET THE POWER FLOW FROM ME! LET THE WILL OF TERRAX BE FELT!
INVISIBLE WAVES OF ENERGY RIPPLE OUT..


AND, BACK AT THE BAXTER BUILDING...
SOMETHING IS HAPPENING! I CAN FEEL THE GROUND TREMBLING EVEN THROUGH THE REINFORCED STRUCTURE OF THIS TOWER
IF ONLY WE KNEW WHERE TERRAX WAS
I'VE FOUND HIM!
HE'S ON TOP OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTER!
SUSAN, YOU KNOW WHAT WE NEED NOW. WE CAN ONLY SEE THE EFFECTS OF TERRAX'S POWER, NOT THE POWER ITSELF.
I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE ASKING MY DARLING! I'VE NEVER ATTEMPTED IT ON SO GREAT A SCALE..
BUT I'LL TRY.
THE INVISIBLE GIRL CONCENTRATES, REACHING OUT WITH AN ALMOST FORGOTTEN MANIFESTATION OF HER POWER
TERRAX'S POWER IS SEEN AS WELL AS FELT AS THE KNIFE-LIKE WAVES SEVER MANHATTAN'S TIES WITH THE REST OF NEW YORK.
MOWING THROUGH THE REGAL BRIDGES
SLICING THE WAVING TUNNELS AS A CHILD'S SHOVEL MIGHT CARELESSLY CLEAVE A BURROWING WORM...
TAXI


AND TERRIBLE AS THE DAMAGE IS TO THE BRIDGES..
...IMAGINE, IF YOU WILL, THE CONDITION IN TUNNELS SUDDENLY OPENED TO THE RIVERS ABOVE!
ELSEWHERE...
SOME MILES AWAY IN THIS UNASSUMING HOUSE IN QUEENS...
MAY PARKER IS SPENDING A QUIET AFTERNOON WITH HER FAVORITE NEPHEW..
THAT WAS A LOT OF FUN, PETER WE REALLY MUST DO IT MORE OFTEN
I DON'T KNOW IF I'M UP TO IT, AUNT MAY IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I BUILT A SNOWMAN THAT BIG.
LET'S HOPE HE LASTS AT LEAST UNTIL...
ARGH!
MY SPIDER-SENSE.. SUCH A PAINFUL SIGNAL!
PETER! WHAT ON EARTH...? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
I-I'M FINE FINE TOO ...TOO MUCH FRUITCAKE NEED... AIR...
GOTTA GET OUTSIDE. MUST BE SOME HORRENDOUS MENACE ATTACKING.
CAN'T IMAGINE HOW IT COULD HAVE TRACKED ME HERE, BUT I CAN'T RISK ENDANGERING AUNT MAY... OR HAVING HER FIND OUT I'M SPIDER-MAN.
BUT AS PETER PARKER STAGGERS ONTO THE PORCH...
HE DISCOVERS THE REASON FOR HIS SUDDEN DANGER-ALERT IS NOT A DIRECT THREAT TO HIM...
HOLY...!! THE WHOLE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN HAS BEEN COVERED BY A GLOWING COCOON!

AND ON THE GEORGE WASHINGTON BRIDGE, DOCTOR DONALD BLAKE LIMPS AWAY FROM AN ABRUPTLY HALTED TAXI...
THIS IS TOO MUCH FOR A LAME SURGEON...
LUCKILY ALL I HAVE TO DO IS TAP MY MYSTIC CANE ON THE GROUND...
AND THE SON OF ODIN SHALL SOON SEE WHAT EVIL DOTH HERE UNFOLD.
AND AS THE MIGHTY THOR TAKES TO THE TROUBLED SKIES, IN AN OFFICE ON LONG ISLAND...
NO, GERRY, I TOLD YOU I WANT THOSE SPECS NOW!
THE MULTI-MILLIONAIRE HEAD OF STARK-INTERNATIONAL IS ABOUT TO HAVE HIS BUSY EVENING DISRUPTED.
LOOK, I DON'T WANT TO ARGUE...
GREAT SCOTT! WHAT'S HAPPENED TO MANHATTAN?
BUT IT IS NOT TONY STARK WHO MOMENTS LATER STREAKS WESTWARD ACROSS THE FACTORY COMPLEX..
IT IS HIS ARMORED ALTER-EGO... IRON MAN!
AND IN THE BELEAGUERED CITY, THE SIGHTLESS ADVENTURER KNOWN AS DAREDEVIL MOVES EASILY ACROSS ITS CRAGGY FACE...
SOMETHING INCREDIBLE MUST BE HAPPENING.
I'M GETTING A STRANGE DISTORTION IN MY RADAR-SENSE
AND THE TENSION IN THE FEW PEOPLE ON THE STREETS IS ALMOST TANGIBLE...
YEOW!
ALMOST MISSED THIS LEDGE. THE WHOLE CITY SEEMS OUT OF PHASE
WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT?

NOT FAR AWAY, IN A LUXURIOUS MANSION OVERLOOKING CENTRAL PARK...
...THE ATMOSPHERE IS LESS THAN TRANQUIL...
JARVIS! WHAT IN BLAZES IS GOING ON?
M-MASTER CAP, MISTRESS WASP! I...I DON'T KNOW! I WAS JUST PREPARING YOUR DINNERS WHEN THE POWER FAILED AND ALL THE ALARMS STARTED SOUNDING!
SOUNDS LIKE YOU OVERLOADED THE CUISINART AGAIN.
THIS IS NO TIME FOR LEVITY, JAN. THOSE ARE MAXIMUM PRIORITY ALARMS AND THE MANSION IS ON EMERGENCY POWER!
HOW CAN THAT BE? AVENGERS MANSION IS TIED IN TO FIVE DIFFERENT MAINLAND POWER GRIDS FOR THE EMERGENCY POWER TO HAVE KICKED IN...
JANET VAN DYNE'S VOICE TRAILS AWAY AS SHE REALIZES WHAT SHE IS SUGGESTING...
THAT'S JUST WHAT IT MEANS, WASP! THE WHOLE OF MANHATTAN MUST HAVE SOMEHOW BEEN CUT LOOSE FROM THE REST OF NEW YORK. AND SOMETHING IS BLOCKING OUR EMERGENCY CALL SIGNAL!
THE PHONES ARE OUT TOO, CAP! I CAN'T RAISE ANY OFF-ISLAND NUMBERS.
OH, DEAR! THAT MEANS WE CAN'T CONTACT MISTER STARK TO GET IN TOUCH WITH IRON MAN...
OH, MY WORD! CAPTAIN AMERICA, LOOK AT THE SKY! WHAT'S HAPPENING TO THE SKY?!

WHAT INDEED?
HEIMDALL'S EYES! THE COCOON DOTH RISE, AND WITH IT GOES THE CITY!
I KNOW NOT WHAT POWER THIS BE, YET SHALL THE GOD OF THUNDER TEST ITS METTLE!
THOR! WAIT!
IRON MAN! KNOWEST THOU THE NATURE OF THIS FORCE WHICH DOTH SURROUND THOR'S ADOPTED HOME?
NO, I DON'T, MY FRIEND. AND WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO INVESTIGATE IT RIGHT NOW. LOOK BELOW. THE TUNNELS ARE FLOODING...
WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING TO HELP THOSE PEOPLE
THEN STAND YOU READY, AVENGER. NE'ER HATH FRIGGA'S SON SO GREAT A TASK ATTEMPTED, YET SHALL I DO WHAT MUST BE DONE..
THE THUNDER GOD DROPS...
AND VANISHES INTO THE WATERY TURMOIL...
WHAT THE HECK IS HE DOING?
MOMENTS LATER, IRON MAN HAS AN ANSWER TO HIS UNSPOKEN QUESTION
BELOW THE SURFACE, THOR UNLEASHES HIS AWESOME, NIGH IMMEASURABLE POWER OVER WIND AND STORM...
.. AND A RAGING HURRICANE ERUPTS BENEATH THE RIVER
THE WATERS PART!

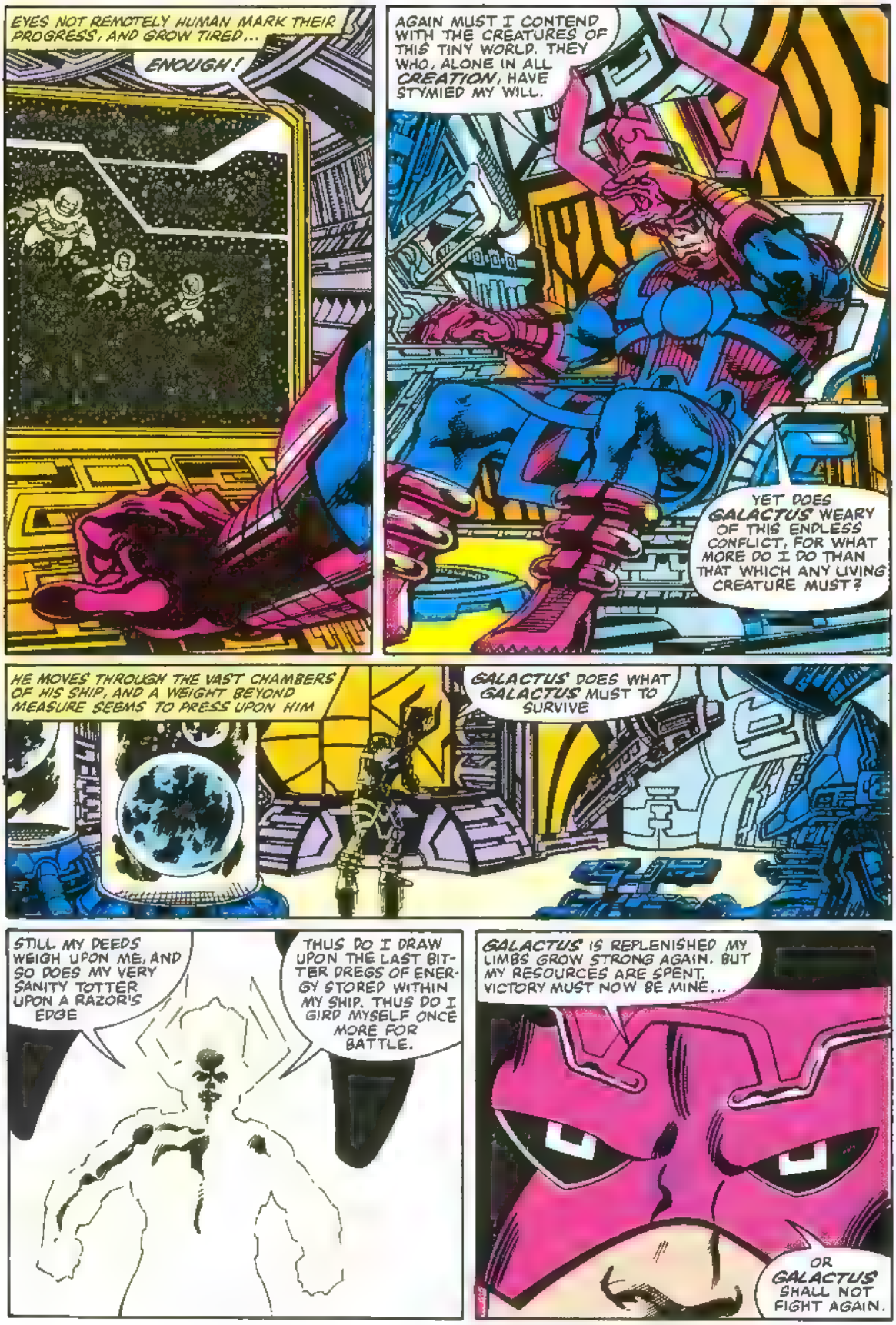
BACK, BACK, BACK THE STRAINING ASGARDIAN DRIVES THE SEETHING WATERS, PUSHING HIS VAST POWERS TO THEIR UTMOST LIMITS..
..AND BEYOND!
SEALED WITHIN HIS ARMORED SHELL, TONY STARK SUPPRESSES A SHUDDER, FEELING SUDDENLY VERY SMALL AND HELPLESS BEFORE THE MIGHT OF A LIVING GOD.
THEN AWE TURNS TO GRIM RESOLVE
AND THE GOLDEN AVENGER LAUNCHES HIMSELF INTO A NEARBY TUNNEL.
MAKE HASTE, MY FRIEND, GOD THOUGH THOR MAY BE, YET DOTH HE HAVE HIS LIMITS.
VERILY, SO GREAT A TASK DOTH WEARY ME MIGHTILY.
HOLD IT AS LONG AS YOU CAN, THUNDER GOD THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF CARS TO GET CLEAR...
"NOT TO MENTION THE SUBWAY TRAINS..."
AND AS THOR TURNS EVERY IOTA OF HIS STRENGTH TO THE IMPOSSIBLE JOB...
BLAST, IT TOOK SO LONG TO GET AWAY FROM AUNT MAY THAT THE ISLAND'S ALMOST OUT OF RANGE.
GOT TO USE THE MOMENTUM OF MY SWING TO GET HIGH ENOUGH TO FIRE A WEB-LINE TO IT.
BOY--I'VE BEEN IN THIS BIZ TOO LONG! I'M TAKING THIS SO CALMLY YOU'D THINK I SAW NEW YORK TAKE OFF EVERY DAY!
THWIP!
GOT TO FIRE MY WEB.. NOW!

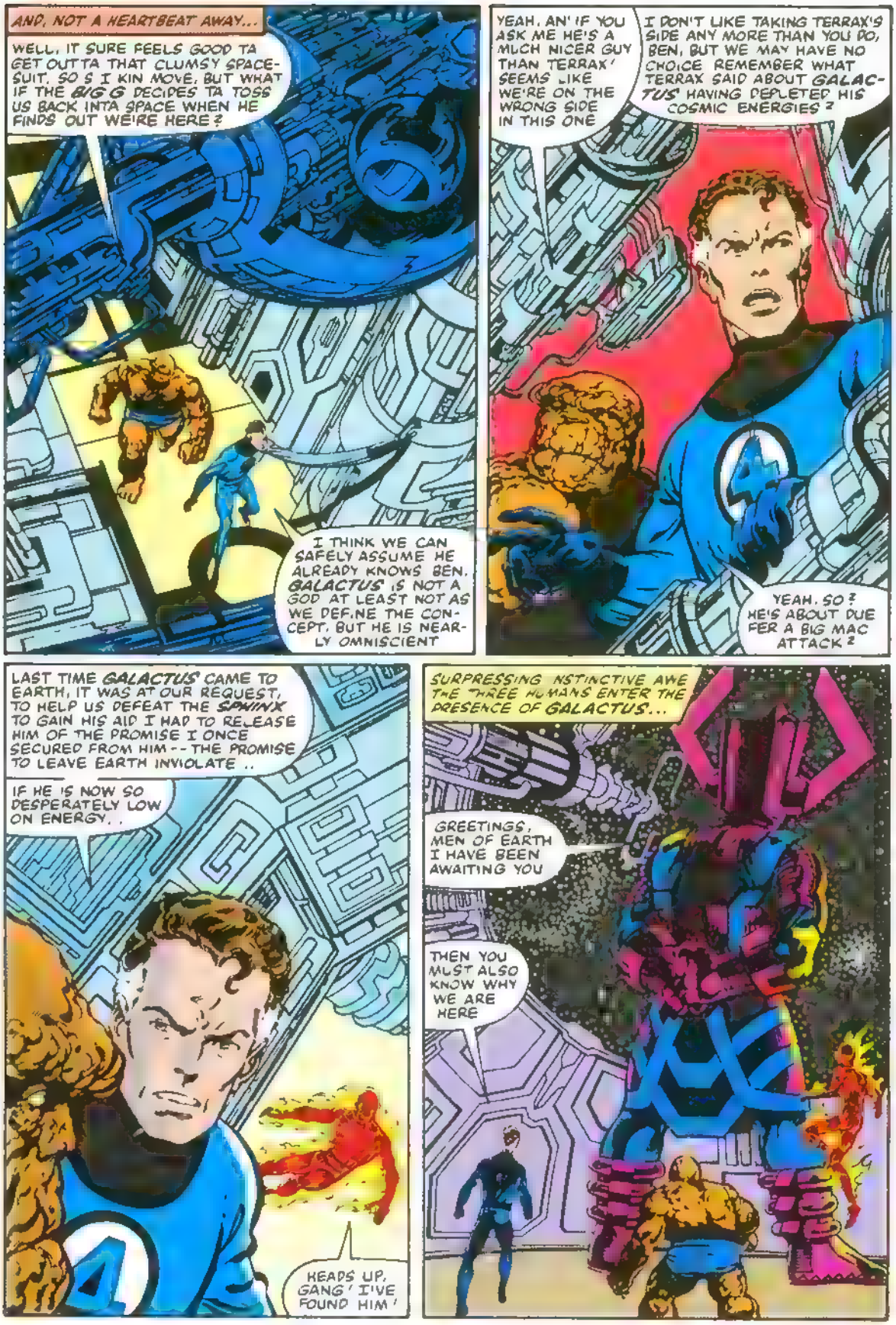
BUT...
OH, NO! IT DIDN'T STICK!
AND THAT'S GONNA LEAVE ME ONE SQUASHED SPIDER-MAN...
...UNLESS I CAN RIG A FAST SAFETY NET...
SPROING!!
MEANWHILE...
ARE YOU SURE YOU CAN KEEP IT UP, SUE? YOU MUST KEEP THE FIELD VISIBLE.
I... I THINK I CAN MANAGE IT, REED.
BUT IT'S SO HUGE... SUCH A STRAIN...
OKAY, BIG BRAIN, WE GOT THE SKY-BIKES AND SPACE-SUITS OUTTA WHAT'S LEFT OF OUR ROCKET. YOU READY TO EXPLAIN WHY WE'LL NEED THE SUITS?
YOU FELT THE ISLAND TREMBLE, BEN. AND YOU KNOW THE INCREDIBLE EXTENT OF TERRAX'S POWER...
UNLESS I'M WRONG WE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY NEED THEIR PROTECTION
REED, SHOULDN'T I COME WITH YOU? IF TERRAX IS AS POWERFUL AS YOU SAY...
STAY WITH SUSAN, FRANKIE. SHE'S DEFENSELESS WHILE ALL HER POWER IS DIVERTED TO THE PROBLEM AT HAND.
THE SKY-CYCLE'S ENGINE WHINES AND MISTER FANTASTIC RISES TO FOLLOW HIS TWO PARTNERS...

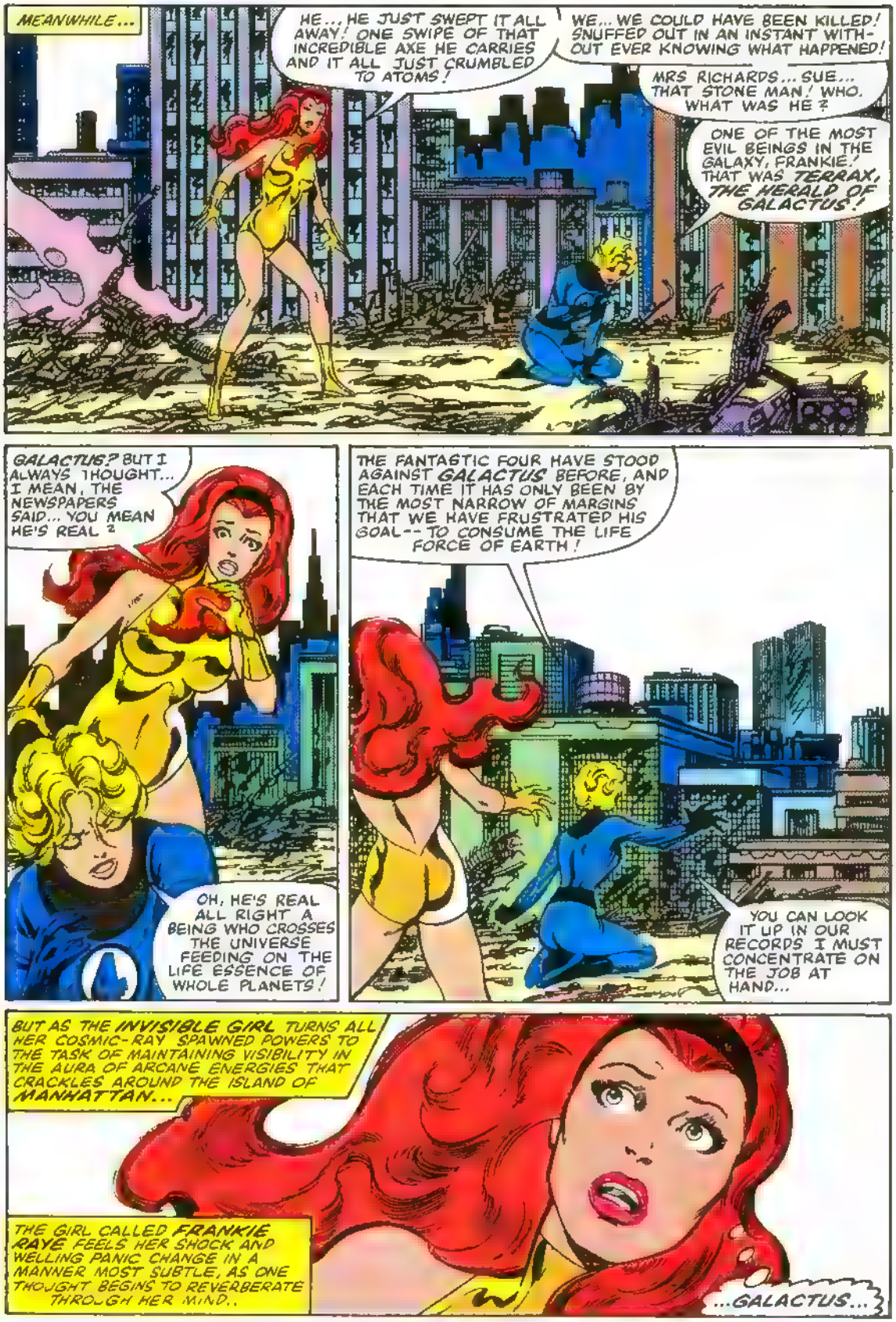
AND AS THE MALE CONTINGENT OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR CLOSES ON THEIR FOE...
NEW YORKERS DEAL WITH A PLETHORA OF PROBLEMS...
FROM TRUNCATED CARS...
...TO SUBWAYS SUDDENLY PLUNGED INTO DARKNESS...
CUT OFF FROM THE MAINLAND, MANHATTAN IS ON EMERGENCY POWER.
OTHERS TAKE A... PROFESSIONAL INTEREST IN THE BLACKOUT.
IT'S THOSE BLASTED SUPER HEROES, ROBERTSON! NOTHING LIKE THIS EVER HAPPENED BEFORE THEY CAME ALONG!
THEN I'D SAY WE WERE VERY LUCKY, JONAH!
AND HIGH ABOVE...
HOLD OFF, JOHNNY. DON'T ATTACK HIM UNTIL WE KNOW WHAT HE'S UP TO
WISE WORDS ONE-CALLED-RICHARDS. YOU CANNOT HARM ME...
...BUT LET ME SHOW YOU THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR ACTIONS SHOULD TERRAX FALL...
HE GESTURES LIKE A STAGE MAGICIAN ABOUT TO PULL A RABBIT FROM A HAT...
AND THE GHOSTLY ENERGY ENVELOPE CONTRACTS. THE FOUR LIVING BEINGS PASS THROUGH UNHARMED...
HEY, WHAT THE...?
AND WITNESS THE TERRIFYING TRUTH OF TERRAX'S DEED AS THE WINDOWS, NOW THRUST ABOVE THE FIELD, EXPLODE OUTWARDS IN UTTER SILENCE...
...INTO A VACUUM!

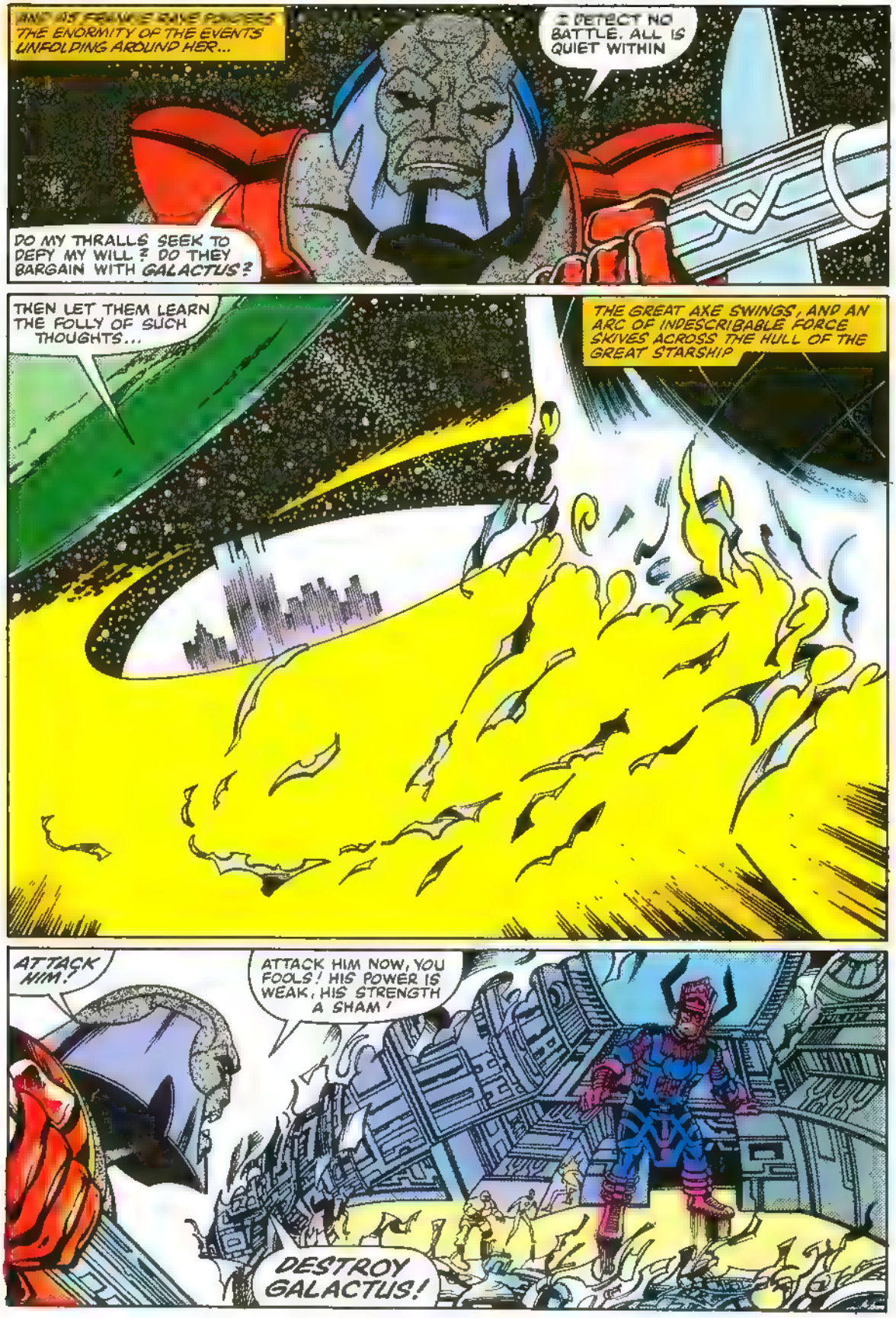
FOR THE TRUTH IS THIS...
THE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN, ALONG WITH THE MILLIONS OF SOULS WHO CALL IT HOME..
..IS ONE HUNDRED MILES UP INTO AIR-LESS SPACE!
AND AS THE CITY ROUNDS THE SPINNING HORIZON...
THERE, MEN OF EARTH! LOOK UPON THE GREAT STAR-SHIP OF HE WHO WOULD BE MY MASTER!
THE VOICE OF TERRAX RINGS IN THE MINDS OF HIS CAPTIVE AUDIENCE.
HE HAS PURSUED ME ACROSS HALF A UNIVERSE, HEEDLESS OF THE ENERGY WASTED IN SUCH A CHASE.
HIS POWER IS DIMMED. HIS LIFE-FORCE AT A LOW EBB YOU WHO HAVE VANQUISHED HIM BEFORE SHALL DO SO AGAIN.
DO SO, OR I SHALL HURL THIS ISLAND AGAINST HIS SHIP, AND ALL HERE SHALL PERISH IN THE ENDLESS DARK AND COLD OF SPACE.

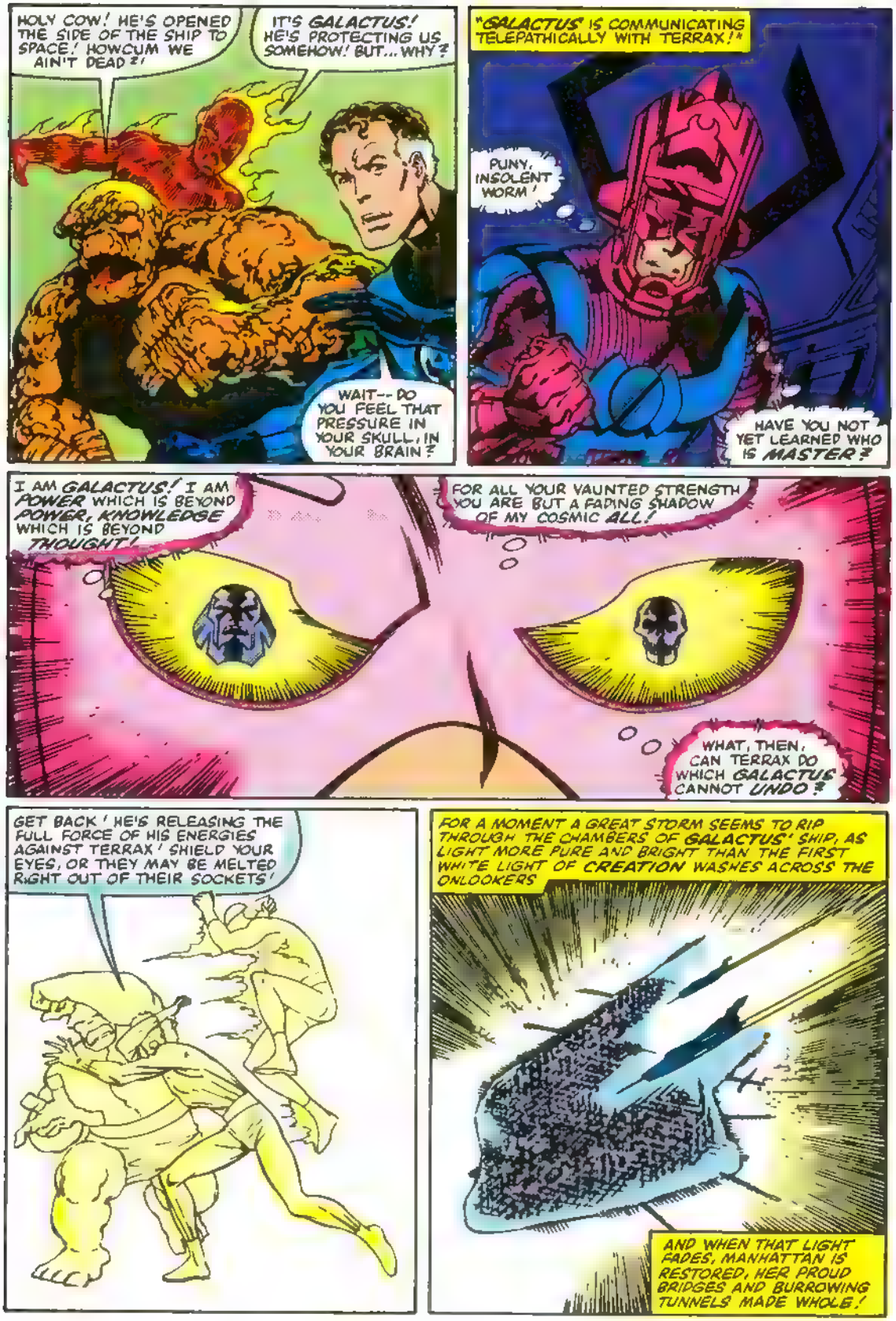
BUT YOU CAN'T MEAN IT! THERE ARE MILLIONS OF PEOPLE DOWN THERE! PEOPLE WHO DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENED BECAUSE MY SISTER IS KEEPING YOUR FORCE-FIELD OPAQUE
YOU CAN'T JUST CASUALLY MURDER ALL OF THEM!
HA HA HA HA! IGNORANT WHELP! HAVE YOUR YEARS AS THE HUMAN TORCH TAUGHT YOU NOTHING? I WAS THE HERALD OF GALACTUS. IT WAS MY TASK TO FIND WORLDS THAT HE MIGHT CONSUME!
WHAT CARE I FOR THE PUNY LIVES OF A SINGLE CITY?
THAT DOES IT! MAYBE IF I CRAM THAT FANCY SWIZZLE STICK DOWN YER MISERABLE THROAT YOU'LL LEARN A LITTLE COMPASSION!
BEN, IN HEAVEN'S NAME, STOP! HE'LL DO IT! YOU KNOW HE WILL!
THE EDGE OF FEAR IN REED RICHARDS' VOICE FREEZES BEN GRIMM.
YA... YA MEAN WE'RE GIVIN' UP? SAY IT AIN'T SO, STRETCHO!
ONLY A FOOL FIGHTS IN A BURNING HOUSE, BEN. WE MUST DO WHAT TERRAX WANTS.
THEN GO, MY UNWILLING SLAVES. BY YOUR ACTIONS WAS I FIRST DELIVERED TO GALACTUS, BY YOUR ACTIONS SHALL I BE FREED!
MINIATURE JET PACKS HISS SOUNDLESSLY INTO THE SURROUNDING VACUUM, THEN THE THREE MEN MOVE AWAY FROM THE HOSTAGE CITY
AND, AS THEY CROSS THE GREAT, COLD GULF THAT SEPARATES THEM FROM THE STAR-SPANNING SPHERE OF GALACTUS...

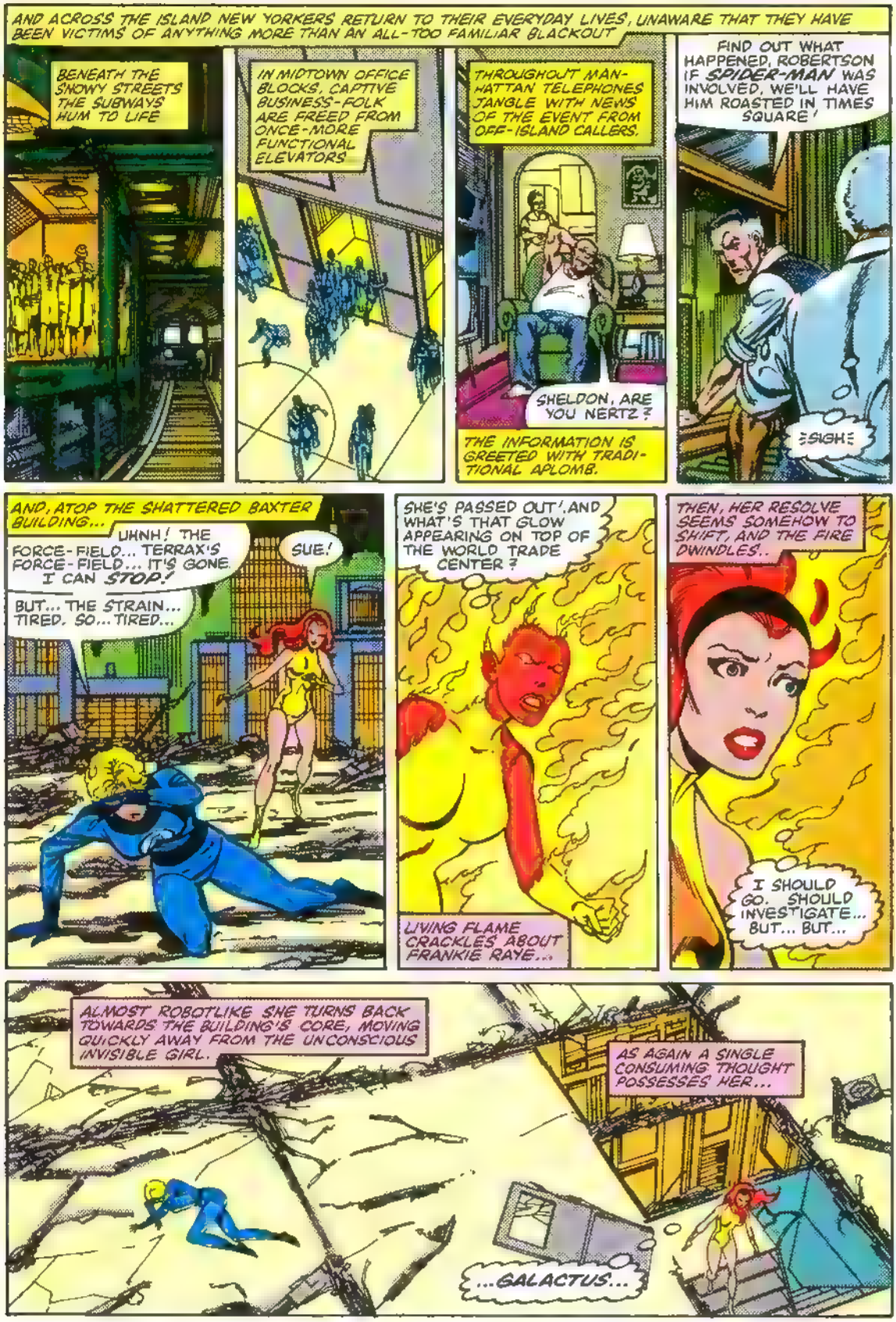

EYES NOT REMOTELY HUMAN MARK THEIR PROGRESS, AND GROW TIRED...
ENOUGH!
AGAIN MUST I CONTEND WITH THE CREATURES OF THIS TINY WORLD. THEY WHO, ALONE IN ALL CREATION, HAVE STYMIED MY WILL.
YET DOES GALACTUS WEARY OF THIS ENDLESS CONFLICT, FOR WHAT MORE DO I DO THAN THAT WHICH ANY LIVING CREATURE MUST?
HE MOVES THROUGH THE VAST CHAMBERS OF HIS SHIP, AND A WEIGHT BEYOND MEASURE SEEMS TO PRESS UPON HIM
GALACTUS DOES WHAT GALACTUS MUST TO SURVIVE
STILL MY DEEDS WEIGH UPON ME, AND SO DOES MY VERY SANITY TOTTER UPON A RAZOR'S EDGE
THUS DO I DRAW UPON THE LAST BITTER DREGS OF ENERGY STORED WITHIN MY SHIP. THUS DO I GIRD MYSELF ONCE MORE FOR BATTLE.
GALACTUS IS REPLENISHED MY LIMBS GROW STRONG AGAIN. BUT MY RESOURCES ARE SPENT. VICTORY MUST NOW BE MINE...
OR GALACTUS SHALL NOT FIGHT AGAIN.


AND, NOT A HEARTBEAT AWAY...
WELL, IT SURE FEELS GOOD TA GET OUTTA THAT CLUMSY SPACE-SUIT. SO S I KIN MOVE, BUT WHAT IF THE BIG G DECIDES TA TOSS US BACK INTA SPACE WHEN HE FINDS OUT WE'RE HERE?
I THINK WE CAN SAFELY ASSUME HE ALREADY KNOWS BEN. GALACTUS IS NOT A GOD AT LEAST NOT AS WE DEFINE THE CONCEPT. BUT HE IS NEARLY OMNISCIENT
YEAH, AN' IF YOU ASK ME HE'S A MUCH NICER GUY THAN TERRAX' SEEMS LIKE WE'RE ON THE WRONG SIDE IN THIS ONE
I DON'T LIKE TAKING TERRAX'S SIDE ANY MORE THAN YOU DO, BEN, BUT WE MAY HAVE NO CHOICE REMEMBER WHAT TERRAX SAID ABOUT GALACTUS' HAVING DEPLETED HIS COSMIC ENERGIES?
YEAH, SO? HE'S ABOUT DUE FER A BIG MAC ATTACK!
LAST TIME GALACTUS CAME TO EARTH, IT WAS AT OUR REQUEST, TO HELP US DEFEAT THE SPHINX TO GAIN HIS AID I HAD TO RELEASE HIM OF THE PROMISE I ONCE SECURED FROM HIM -- THE PROMISE TO LEAVE EARTH INVIOLATE ..
IF HE IS NOW SO DESPERATELY LOW ON ENERGY. .
HEADS UP, GANG! I'VE FOUND HIM!
SURPRESSING INSTINCTIVE AWE THE THREE HUMANS ENTER THE PRESENCE OF GALACTUS...
GREETINGS, MEN OF EARTH I HAVE BEEN AWAITING YOU
THEN YOU MUST ALSO KNOW WHY WE ARE HERE

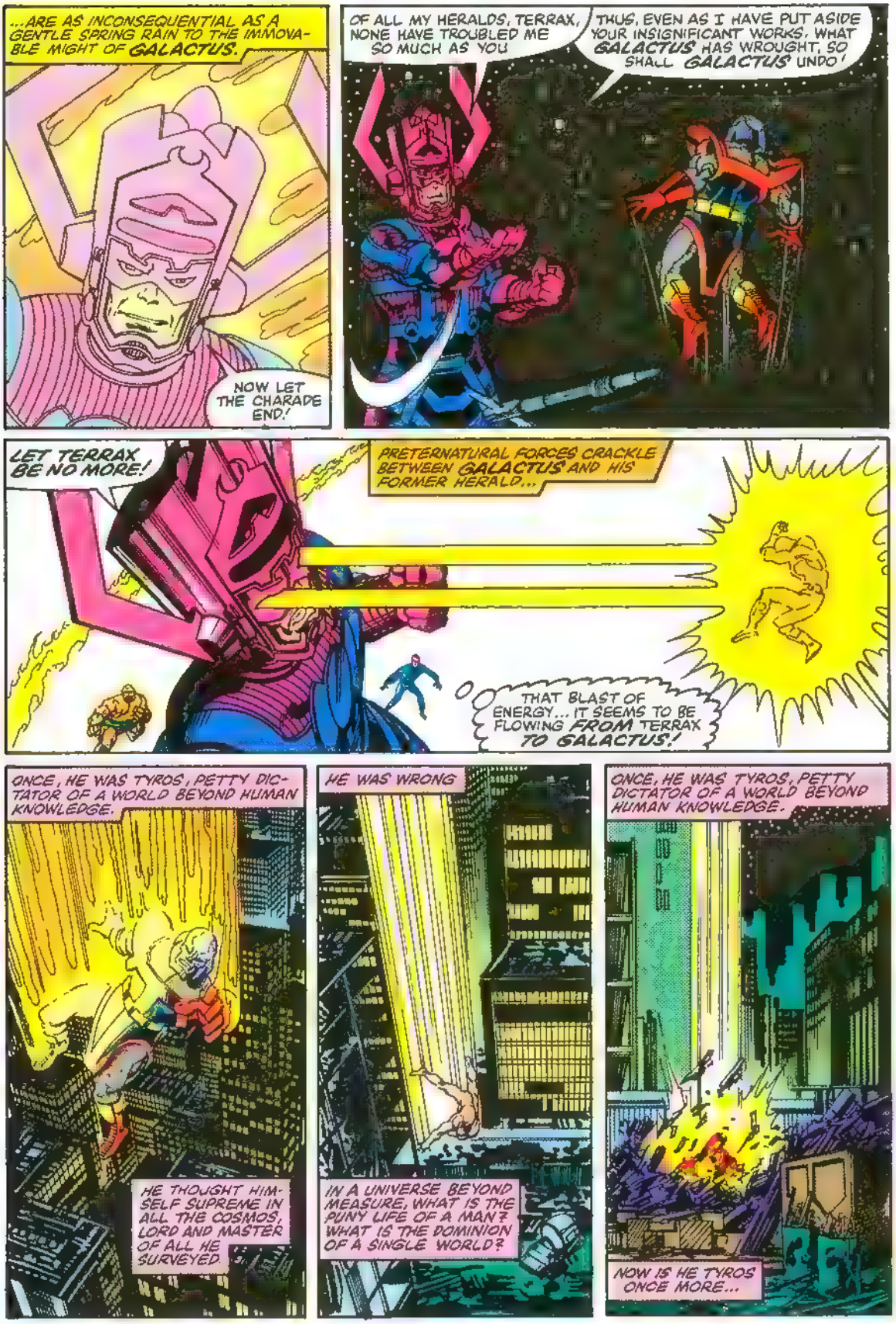

MEANWHILE...
HE... HE JUST SWEPT IT ALL AWAY! ONE SWIPE OF THAT INCREDIBLE AXE HE CARRIES AND IT ALL JUST CRUMBLED TO ATOMS!
WE... WE COULD HAVE BEEN KILLED! SNUFFED OUT IN AN INSTANT WITHOUT EVER KNOWING WHAT HAPPENED!
MRS RICHARDS... SUE... THAT STONE MAN! WHO, WHAT WAS HE?
ONE OF THE MOST EVIL BEINGS IN THE GALAXY, FRANKIE,' THAT WAS TERRAX, THE HERALD OF GALACTUS!
GALACTUS? BUT I ALWAYS THOUGHT... I MEAN, THE NEWSPAPERS SAID... YOU MEAN HE'S REAL?
OH, HE'S REAL ALL RIGHT A BEING WHO CROSSES THE UNIVERSE FEEDING ON THE LIFE ESSENCE OF WHOLE PLANETS!
THE FANTASTIC FOUR HAVE STOOD AGAINST GALACTUS BEFORE, AND EACH TIME IT HAS ONLY BEEN BY THE MOST NARROW OF MARGINS THAT WE HAVE FRUSTRATED HIS GOAL-- TO CONSUME THE LIFE FORCE OF EARTH!
YOU CAN LOOK IT UP IN OUR RECORDS I MUST CONCENTRATE ON THE JOB AT HAND...
BUT AS THE INVISIBLE GIRL TURNS ALL HER COSMIC-RAY SPAWNED POWERS TO THE TASK OF MAINTAINING VISIBILITY IN THE AURA OF ARCANE ENERGIES THAT CRACKLES AROUND THE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN...
THE GIRL CALLED FRANKIE RAYE FEELS HER SHOCK AND WELLING PANIC CHANGE IN A MANNER MOST SUBTLE, AS ONE THOUGHT BEGINS TO REVERBERATE THROUGH HER MIND..
...GALACTUS...

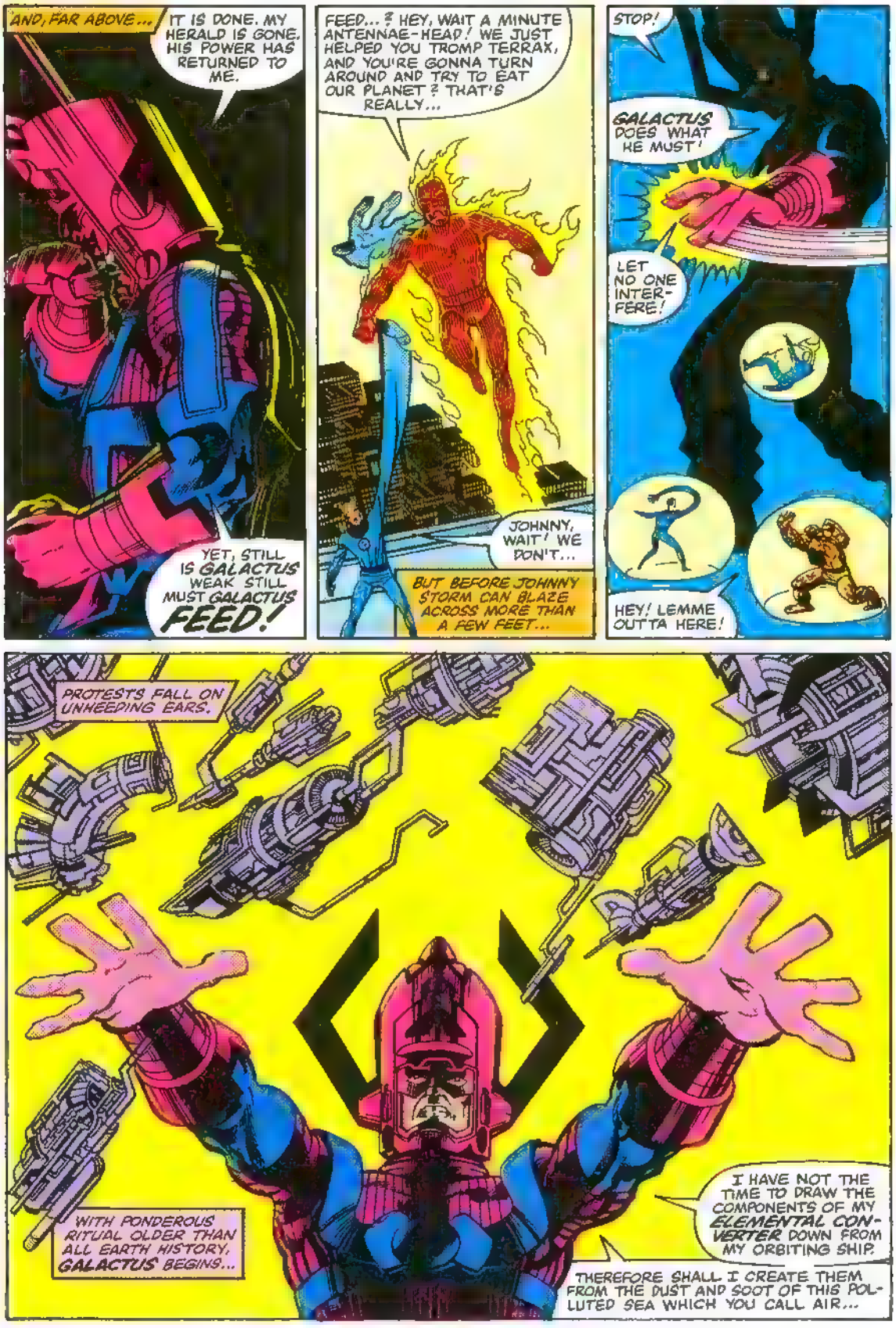

AND AS FRANKIE RAYE PONDERS THE ENORMITY OF THE EVENTS UNFOLDING AROUND HER...
I DETECT NO BATTLE. ALL IS QUIET WITHIN
DO MY THRALLS SEEK TO DEFY MY WILL? DO THEY BARGAIN WITH GALACTUS?
THEN LET THEM LEARN THE FOLLY OF SUCH THOUGHTS...
THE GREAT AXE SWINGS, AND AN ARC OF INDESCRIBABLE FORCE SKIVES ACROSS THE HULL OF THE GREAT STARSHIP
ATTACK HIM!
ATTACK HIM NOW, YOU FOOLS! HIS POWER IS WEAK, HIS STRENGTH A SHAM!
DESTROY GALACTUS!


HOLY COW! HE'S OPENED THE SIDE OF THE SHIP TO SPACE! HOWCUM WE AIN'T DEAD?!
IT'S GALACTUS! HE'S PROTECTING US SOMEHOW! BUT... WHY?
WAIT-- DO YOU FEEL THAT PRESSURE IN YOUR SKULL, IN YOUR BRAIN?
"GALACTUS" IS COMMUNICATING TELEPATHICALLY WITH TERRAX!"
PUNY, INSOLENT WORM!
HAVE YOU NOT YET LEARNED WHO IS MASTER?
I AM GALACTUS! I AM POWER WHICH IS BEYOND POWER, KNOWLEDGE WHICH IS BEYOND THOUGHT!
FOR ALL YOUR VAUNTED STRENGTH YOU ARE BUT A FADING SHADOW OF MY COSMIC ALL!
WHAT, THEN, CAN TERRAX DO WHICH GALACTUS CANNOT UNDO?
GET BACK! HE'S RELEASING THE FULL FORCE OF HIS ENERGIES AGAINST TERRAX! SHIELD YOUR EYES, OR THEY MAY BE MELTED RIGHT OUT OF THEIR SOCKETS!
FOR A MOMENT A GREAT STORM SEEMS TO RIP THROUGH THE CHAMBERS OF GALACTUS' SHIP, AS LIGHT MORE PURE AND BRIGHT THAN THE FIRST WHITE LIGHT OF CREATION WASHES ACROSS THE ONLOOKERS
AND WHEN THAT LIGHT FADES, MANHATTAN IS RESTORED, HER PROUD BRIDGES AND BURROWING TUNNELS MADE WHOLE!


AND ACROSS THE ISLAND NEW YORKERS RETURN TO THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES, UNAWARE THAT THEY HAVE BEEN VICTIMS OF ANYTHING MORE THAN AN ALL-TOO FAMILIAR BLACKOUT
BENEATH THE SNOWY STREETS THE SUBWAYS HUM TO LIFE
IN MIDTOWN OFFICE BLOCKS, CAPTIVE BUSINESS-FOLK ARE FREED FROM ONCE-MORE FUNCTIONAL ELEVATORS
THROUGHOUT MANHATTAN TELEPHONES JANGLE WITH NEWS OF THE EVENT FROM OFF-ISLAND CALLERS.
SHELDON, ARE YOU NERTZ?
THE INFORMATION IS GREETED WITH TRADITIONAL APLOMB.
FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED, ROBERTSON IF SPIDER-MAN WAS INVOLVED, WE'LL HAVE HIM ROASTED IN TIMES SQUARE!
SIGH
AND, ATOP THE SHATTERED BAXTER BUILDING...
UHNH! THE FORCE-FIELD... TERRAX'S FORCE-FIELD... IT'S GONE. I CAN STOP!
SUE!
BUT... THE STRAIN... TIRED. SO... TIRED...
SHE'S PASSED OUT! AND WHAT'S THAT GLOW APPEARING ON TOP OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTER?
LIVING FLAME CRACKLES ABOUT FRANKIE RAYE...
THEN, HER RESOLVE SEEMS SOMEHOW TO SHIFT, AND THE FIRE DWINDLES..
I SHOULD GO. SHOULD INVESTIGATE... BUT... BUT...
ALMOST ROBOTLIKE SHE TURNS BACK TOWARDS THE BUILDING'S CORE, MOVING QUICKLY AWAY FROM THE UNCONSCIOUS INVISIBLE GIRL.
AS AGAIN A SINGLE CONSUMING THOUGHT POSSESSES HER...
...GALACTUS...

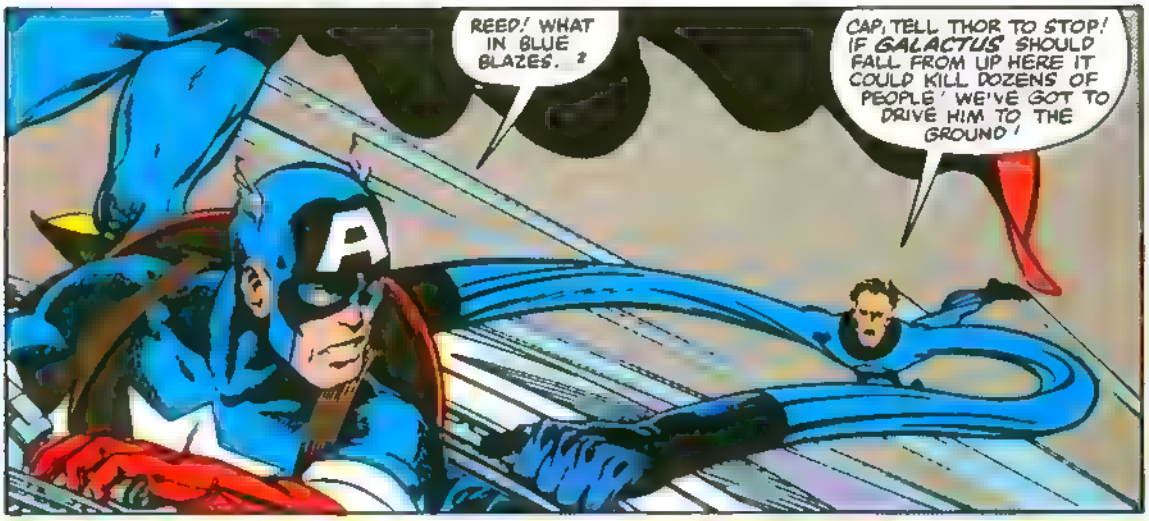
ELSEWHERE, WHAT OF THE GLOW FRANKIE RAYE NOTICED ATOP THE TWIN TOWERS OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTER ?
AS THE GHOSTLY NIMBUS FADES, ACROSS THE 110 STORY GAP THAT SEPARATES THE TWO BUILDINGS, OPPOSING FORCES FACE EACH OTHER
TO EVEN AN UNTRAINED EYE IT WOULD SEEM OBVIOUS THAT A GULF GREATER THAN MERE DISTANCE SEPARATES THE TWO SIDES IN THIS CONFRONTATION
N...NO!
IT CANNOT BE! MY POWER IS GREATER THAN YOURS! YOU ARE DRAINED, WEAK! YOU SUBSIST ON THE ARTIFICIAL ENERGIES GENERATED WITHIN YOUR SHIP.
YOU CANNOT DO THIS! YOU HAVE NOT THE POWER!
"ARTIFICIAL ENERGIES ?"
TERRAX SHALL BE TRIUMPHANT!!
BUT THERE IS PERHAPS THE FAINTEST TREMOR OF FEAR IN TERRAX'S VOICE, AND THE ENERGIES THAT LASH FROM THE COSMIC-POWERED AXE...

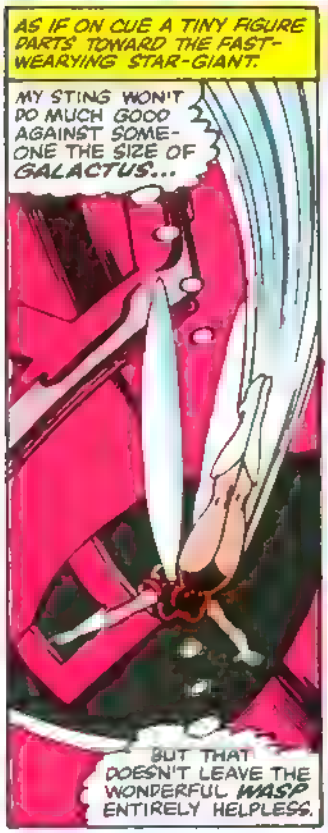

...ARE AS INCONSEQUENTIAL AS A GENTLE SPRING RAIN TO THE IMMOVABLE MIGHT OF GALACTUS.
NOW LET THE CHARADE END!
OF ALL MY HERALDS, TERRAX, NONE HAVE TROUBLED ME SO MUCH AS YOU
THUS, EVEN AS I HAVE PUT ASIDE YOUR INSIGNIFICANT WORKS, WHAT GALACTUS HAS WROUGHT, SO SHALL GALACTUS UNDO!
LET TERRAX BE NO MORE!
PRETERNATURAL FORCES CRACKLE BETWEEN GALACTUS AND HIS FORMER HERALD...
THAT BLAST OF ENERGY... IT SEEMS TO BE FLOWING FROM TERRAX TO GALACTUS!
ONCE, HE WAS TYROS, PETTY DICTATOR OF A WORLD BEYOND HUMAN KNOWLEDGE.
HE THOUGHT HIMSELF SUPREME IN ALL THE COSMOS, LORD AND MASTER OF ALL HE SURVEYED.
HE WAS WRONG
IN A UNIVERSE BEYOND MEASURE, WHAT IS THE PUNY LIFE OF A MAN? WHAT IS THE DOMINION OF A SINGLE WORLD?
ONCE, HE WAS TYROS, PETTY DICTATOR OF A WORLD BEYOND HUMAN KNOWLEDGE.
NOW IS HE TYROS ONCE MORE...


AND, FAR ABOVE...
IT IS DONE. MY HERALD IS GONE, HIS POWER HAS RETURNED TO ME.
YET, STILL IS GALACTUS WEAK STILL MUST GALACTUS FEED!
FEED...? HEY, WAIT A MINUTE ANTENNAE-HEAD! WE JUST HELPED YOU TROMP TERRAX, AND YOU'RE GONNA TURN AROUND AND TRY TO EAT OUR PLANET? THAT'S REALLY...
JOHNNY, WAIT! WE DON'T...
BUT BEFORE JOHNNY STORM CAN BLAZE ACROSS MORE THAN A FEW FEET...
STOP!
GALACTUS DOES WHAT HE MUST!
LET NO ONE INTERFERE!
HEY! LEMME OUTTA HERE!
PROTESTS FALL ON UNHEEDING EARS.
WITH PONDEROUS RITUAL OLDER THAN ALL EARTH HISTORY, GALACTUS BEGINS...
I HAVE NOT THE TIME TO DRAW THE COMPONENTS OF MY ELEMENTAL CONVERTER DOWN FROM MY ORBITING SHIP.
THEREFORE SHALL I CREATE THEM FROM THE DUST AND SOOT OF THIS POLLUTED SEA WHICH YOU CALL AIR...

THEN, A SURREAL IMAGE AS THE FLOATING PARTS BIND TOGETHER...
LIKE A GREAT MACHINE EXPLODING ON SOME MAD WORLD WHERE TIME RUNS BACKWARDS.
AND, UNDER THE SHADOW OF THAT GROWING ENGINE...
GALACTUS, PLEASE! I BEG YOU! THERE ARE FOUR BILLION SOULS UPON THIS EARTH! IN THE NAME OF HUMANITY YOU CANNOT DO THIS!
SPEAK TO ME NOT OF HUMANITY, REED RICHARDS! YOU TALK OF COLOR TO ONE STRUCK BLIND. MY HUMANITY IS LOST IN THE SWIRLING MISTS OF TIME
YES, ONCE EVEN GALACTUS WAS A MAN, A MERE MORTAL SUCH AS YOU, THOUGH MEMORIES OF THAT LIFE ARE BUT A DIM AND DYING PAIN WITHIN MY HEART
THE PAST IS DONE AND GONE, AND MOURN IT THOUGH WE MAY, IT CANNOT BE RETRIEVED. SO DO NOT SPEAK TO ME OF FOUR BILLION LIVES. GALACTUS HAS SEEN THE END OF FORTY TIMES FOUR BILLION WORLDS! MUST WE KNOW GRIEF FOR EACH OF THESE?
HAD HE BUT TEARS TO CRY, GALACTUS COULD WEEP OCEANS IN THEIR MEMORY, AND IN THE END THEY WOULD STILL BE DEAD, AND MADNESS WOULD AT LAST HAVE CLAIMED ME.
SO DO I TURN MY THOUGHTS EVER FROM THAT PATH, FOR ONE FOOT SET UPON IT...
...AND IS A JOURNEY THUS BEGUN, FROM WHICH NO CREATURE EVER COULD RETURN.
NOW... LET THE FINAL SWITCH BE THROWN...
I SAY THEE NAY!
WHO?!?

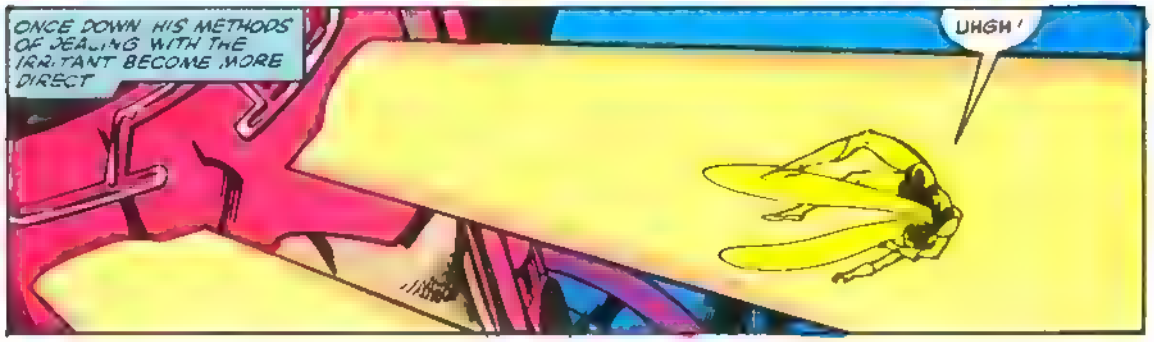
TIS THE SON OF ODIN WHO DOTH NOW CONTEND WITH THEE, GALACTUS! AND THO' IN THE PAST HATH THOR STOOD AS AN ALLY AT THY SIDE, I SHALL SEE THEE FALL ERE THIS WORLD SHALL BE THINE!
EASY, THUNDER GOD HE'S MANAGED TO HALT HIS FALL WITH AN ANTI-GRAVITY FIELD.
HE MAY BE A LOT TOUGHER THAN YOU THINK
TOUGH HE MAY BE, CAP, BUT I THINK HE'LL FIND HE'S BITTEN OFF MORE THAN HE CAN CHEW WITH THE AVENGERS ON THE JOB!
IRON MAN'S AWESOME REPULSOR RAYS LANCE DOWN AT THE STAGGERED TITAN...
AS CAPTAIN AMERICA PILOTS THE HURTLING QUINJET IN FOR A SECOND ASSAULT BY THE MIGHTY THOR.
BUT, AS THE WAVES OF FURY CRASH ACROSS GALACTUS, THE FF FIND THEMSELVES FREED...
THOR! NO!


REED! WHAT IN BLUE BLAZES...?
CAP, TELL THOR TO STOP! IF GALACTUS SHOULD FALL FROM UP HERE IT COULD KILL DOZENS OF PEOPLE! WE'VE GOT TO DRIVE HIM TO THE GROUND!

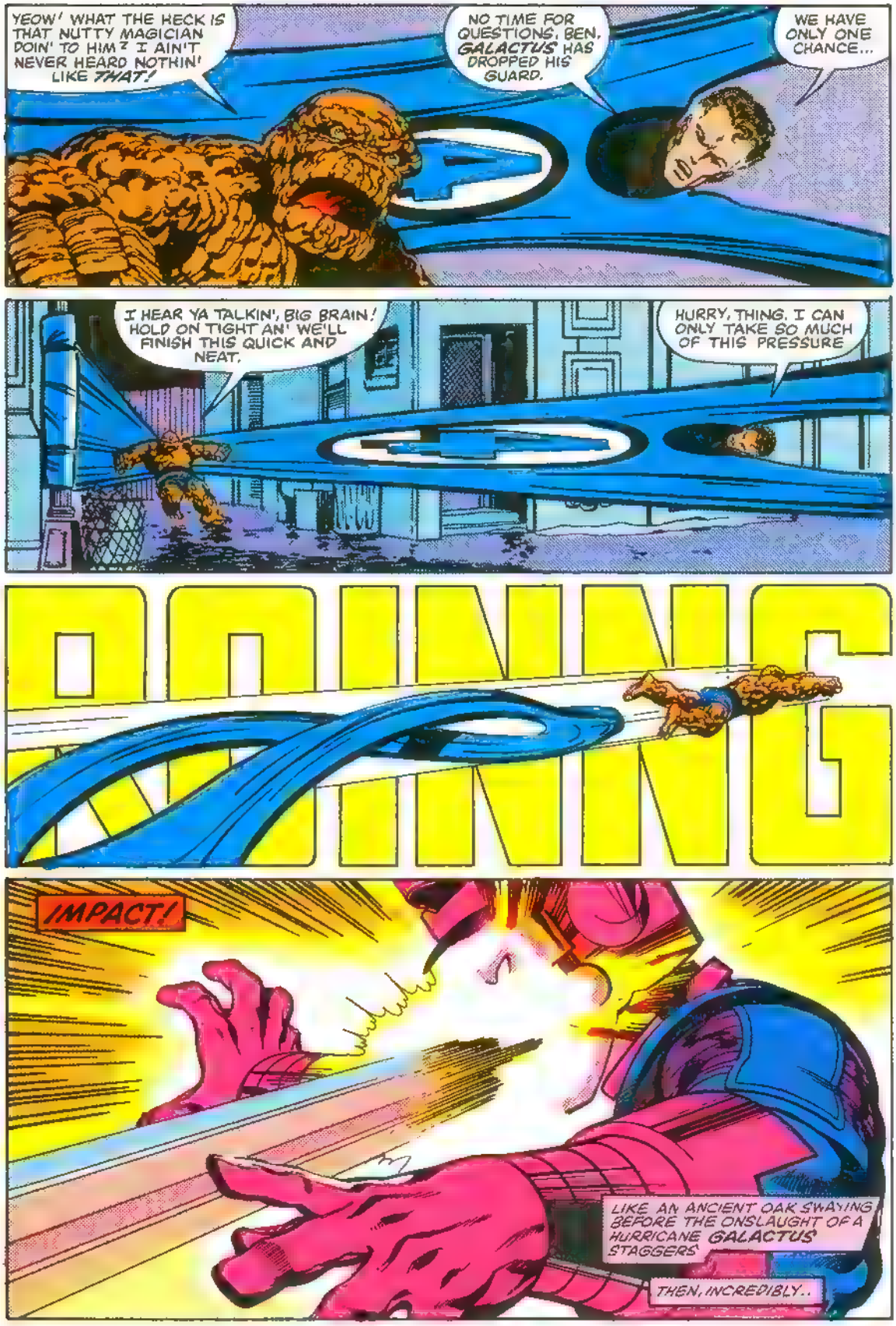

AS IF ON CUE A TINY FIGURE DARTS TOWARD THE FAST-WEARYING STAR-GIANT.
MY STING WON'T DO MUCH GOOD AGAINST SOME-ONE THE SIZE OF GALACTUS...
BUT THAT DOESN'T LEAVE THE WONDERFUL WASP ENTIRELY HELPLESS.

FASTER THAN CAN BE FOLLOWED JAN SLIPS INTO ONE OF THE EYE-HOLES IN GALACTUS' HELMET...
...AND THOUGH SHE IS TOO SMALL TO DO ANY ACTUAL DAMAGE...

.. HER PRESENCE IS SUFFICIENTLY ANNOYING AND DISTRACTING TO FORCE GALACTUS TO SETTLE TO THE STREET


ONCE DOWN HIS METHODS OF DEALING WITH THE IRRITANT BECOME MORE DIRECT
UHGH!

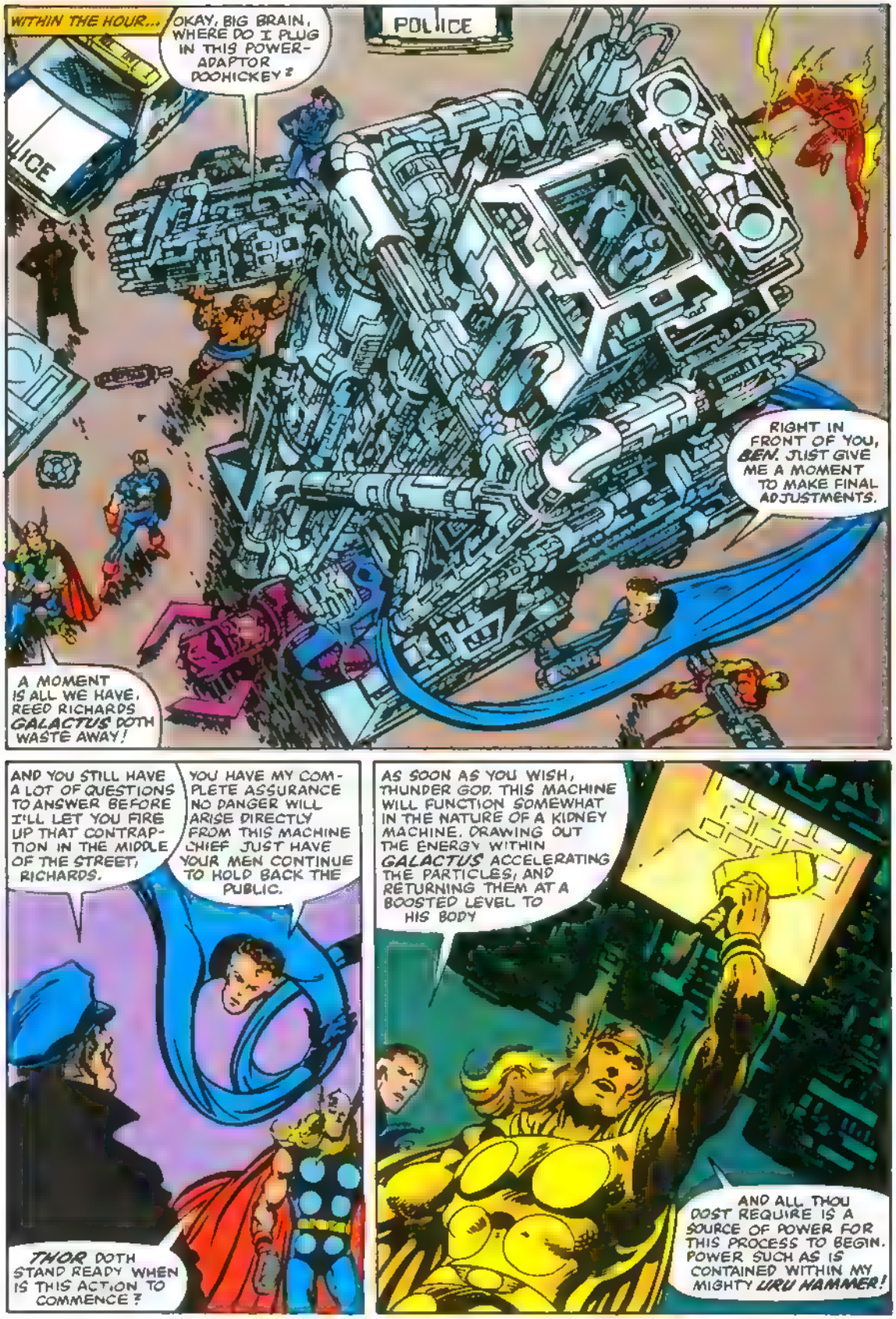
JUST BELOW
I DON'T LIKE THE LOOKS OF THIS. TERRAX SAID GALACTUS WAS WEAK, BUT HE'S HOLDING HIS OWN AGAINST THOR AND IRON MAN TOGETHER!
I AIN'T SO SURE OF THAT, TORCHIE. IS IT MY IMAGINATION..
...OR DOES GALACTUS LOOK... SMALLER?
IT'S NOT IMAGINATION, BEN. GALACTUS IS USING HIS ENERGY RESERVES FASTER THAN HIS BODY CAN REPLENISH THEM. HE'S ACTUALLY DWINDLING IN SIZE.
BUT I FEAR HIS POWER MAY STILL PROVE TOO MUCH. HE MAY YET EMERGE THE VICTOR IN THIS CONFLICT.
PERHAPS NOT, MY FRIEND.
WHO..? DOCTOR STRANGE!
AT YOUR SERVICE ONCE MORE, PROFESSOR RICHARDS, IF SERVICE I MAY BE!
THE MAGE'S CLOAK OF LEVITATION BILLOWS AS DOCTOR STRANGE SETTLES TO EARTH
BUT SURELY EVEN YOUR POWERS ARE OF NO USE AGAINST THE LIKES OF GALACTUS?
NOT DIRECTLY, PERHAPS, MY POWERS OVER MATTERS PHYSICAL ARE LIMITED
STILL, THERE ARE THINGS A MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS MAY DO WHICH TRANSCEND MERE FORCE.
HE GESTURES...
AND AROUND GALACTUS, THE FURY OF BATTLE GROWS STILL.
THE TITAN SEEMS TO GAZE AT THINGS UNSEEN
HIS EYES GROW WIDE HIS FACE PALES,
HE TREMBLES, AND THEN..
...GALACTUS SCREAMS!

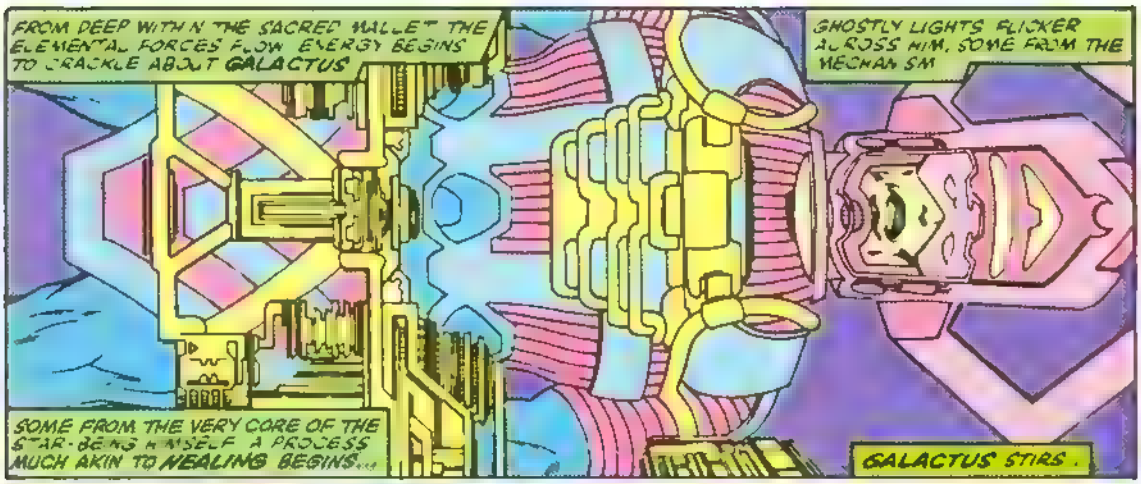

YEOW! WHAT THE HECK IS THAT NUTTY MAGICIAN DOIN' TO HIM? I AIN'T NEVER HEARD NOTHIN' LIKE THAT!
NO TIME FOR QUESTIONS, BEN. GALACTUS HAS DROPPED HIS GUARD.
WE HAVE ONLY ONE CHANCE...
I HEAR YA TALKIN', BIG BRAIN! HOLD ON TIGHT AN' WE'LL FINISH THIS QUICK AND NEAT.
HURRY, THING. I CAN ONLY TAKE SO MUCH OF THIS PRESSURE
RRRR

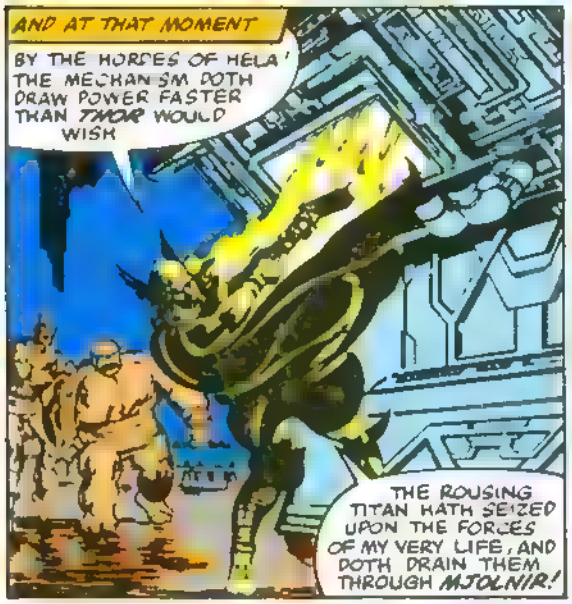
GALACTUS FALLS!

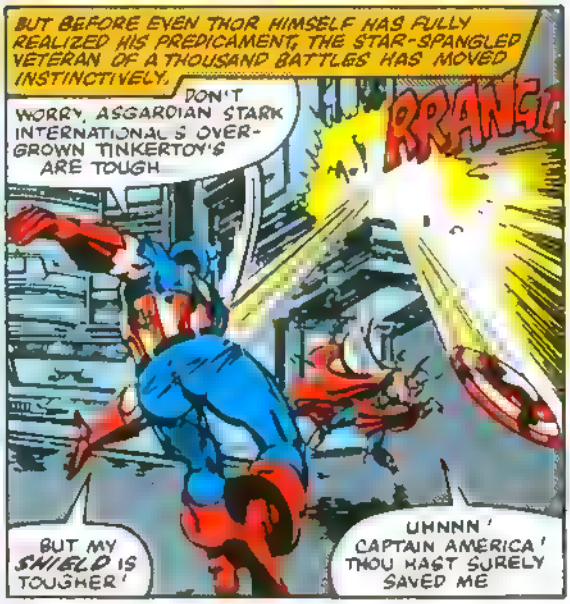
SILENCE NOW. AND FRIGHTENING STILLNESS AS EIGHT OF EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES GATHER ROUND THE FALLEN COLOSSUS
EVEN THE EVER-LOQUACIOUS THING FINDS HIS SUPPLY OF WISECRACKS SUDDENLY EXHAUSTED.
I NEVER THOUGHT I'D LIVE TA SEE THIS! THAT MUSTA BEEN SOME SPELL, DOC. WATCHA DO TO HIM?
IT IS CALLED THE IMAGES OF IKONN, BEN GRIMM.
I REACHED INTO THE DARKEST CORNERS OF HIS MIND TO CONFRONT GALACTUS WITH THE GHOSTS OF ALL THOSE HE HAS SLAIN
INCREDIBLE! NO WONDER HE COLLAPSED HIS MIND MUST HAVE CLOSED COMPLETELY TO ESCAPE MADNESS!
BUT, HE'S SO STILL, REED. ALMOST AS IF HE'S... DYING?
I'M AFRAID YOU'RE RIGHT, WASP HE IS ONLY MOMENTS FROM DEATH.
WELL, I HATE TO SOUND HARD-HEARTED, BUT THAT WILL SOLVE EVERYTHING, WON'T IT?
NO, JOHNNY, IT WON'T. AND IF YOU'LL THINK FOR A MOMENT YOU'LL REALIZE OUR PROBLEMS HAVE ONLY BEGUN!
I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO SAY, REED, AND I CONCUR. GALACTUS MAY BE THE GREATEST MENACE WE'VE EVER FACED, BUT HE IS ALSO A LIVING BEING.
STRETCH.. YA DON'T MEAN...
WE HAVE NO CHOICE, OLD FRIEND.
WE HAVE TO SAVE GALACTUS!

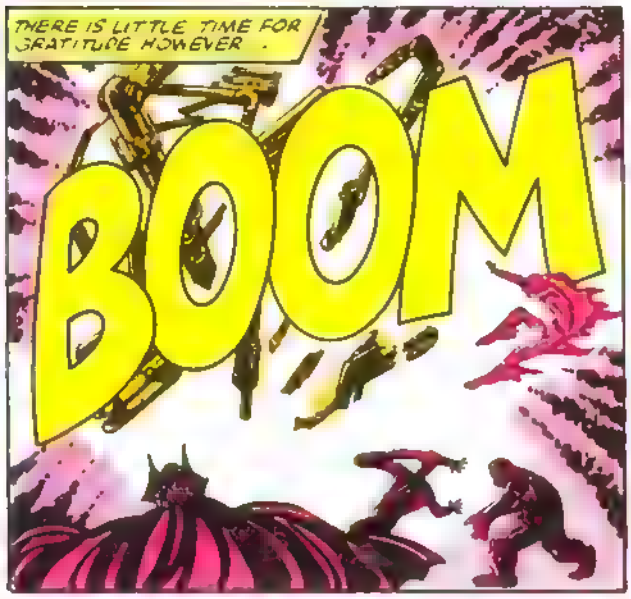
WE BETTER MOVE FAST THEN, STRETCH! THE WAY HE'S SHRINKIN' THERE'LL BE NOTHIN' LEFT OF HIM TA SAVE INSIDE A COUPLA HOURS.
BUT, WHAT IS THERE TO DO? I AM TRAINED IN BOTH THE MYSTIC AND THE MEDICINAL ARTS, YET SUCH A TASK AS THIS IS BEYOND EITHER SKILL
DOCTOR STRANGE DOTH SPEAK TRULY. AS THE MORTAL DON BLAKE, THOR IS ALSO TRAINED AS A PHYSICIAN, BUT TO DOCTOR GALACTUS...?!
THE THING IS RIGHT. GALACTUS IS DWINDLING RAPIDLY. HIS ALIEN METABOLISM IS DRAWING ON HIS BODY'S OWN ENERGIES IN LIEU OF THE LIFE-ESSENCE OF THIS PLANET
BUT, THERE WAS SOMETHING TERRAX SAID ABOUT GALACTUS SUBSISTING ON "ARTIFICIAL ENERGIES..."
IRON MAN, DO YOU THINK YOUR EMPLOYER WOULD SEE FIT TO LEND US SOME EQUIPMENT...?
"I DON'T CARE FOR THIS MUCH," REPLIES THE ARMORED AVENGER, "BUT I SEEM TO BE OUTVOTED. I'LL DO WHAT I CAN..."
SO IT IS THAT A FEW MINUTES LATER A FAMILIAR FIGURE STREAKS OVER A LONG ISLAND INDUSTRIAL SITE...
stark
MOMENTS LATER, THE NIGHT SHIFT SHIPPING CLERK HAS A SURPRISING VISITOR.
THIS IS MIGHTY EXPENSIVE STUFF YOU'RE ASKIN' ME TA HAND OVER, BODYGUARD. BUT I GUESS IT'S OKAY, SEEIN' AS IT'S SIGNED BY MISTER STARK HIMSELF!
NATURALLY I HAD NO DIFFICULTY GAINING PERMISSION FROM MY "BOSS", SINCE I AM TONY STARK.
AND TEN MINUTES AFTER THAT...
I HOPE RICHARDS KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING, I'M DOUBTFUL WE COULD DEFEAT GALACTUS A SECOND TIME TONIGHT, AND IF HE SHOULD FAIL TO BE GRATEFUL ENOUGH FOR OUR HELP...
...IT COULD QUITE LITERALLY MEAN THE END OF EVERYTHING!


WITHIN THE HOUR...
OKAY, BIG BRAIN, WHERE DO I PLUG IN THIS POWER-ADAPTOR DOOHICKEY?
POLICE
RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU, BEN. JUST GIVE ME A MOMENT TO MAKE FINAL ADJUSTMENTS.
A MOMENT IS ALL WE HAVE, REED RICHARDS GALACTUS DOTH WASTE AWAY!
AND YOU STILL HAVE A LOT OF QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BEFORE I'LL LET YOU FIRE UP THAT CONTRAPTION IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET, RICHARDS.
YOU HAVE MY COMPLETE ASSURANCE NO DANGER WILL ARISE DIRECTLY FROM THIS MACHINE CHIEF JUST HAVE YOUR MEN CONTINUE TO HOLD BACK THE PUBLIC.
THOR DOTH STAND READY WHEN IS THIS ACTION TO COMMENCE?
AS SOON AS YOU WISH, THUNDER GOD. THIS MACHINE WILL FUNCTION SOMEWHAT IN THE NATURE OF A KIDNEY MACHINE. DRAWING OUT THE ENERGY WITHIN GALACTUS ACCELERATING THE PARTICLES, AND RETURNING THEM AT A BOOSTED LEVEL TO HIS BODY
AND ALL THOU DOST REQUIRE IS A SOURCE OF POWER FOR THIS PROCESS TO BEGIN. POWER SUCH AS IS CONTAINED WITHIN MY MIGHTY URU HAMMER!

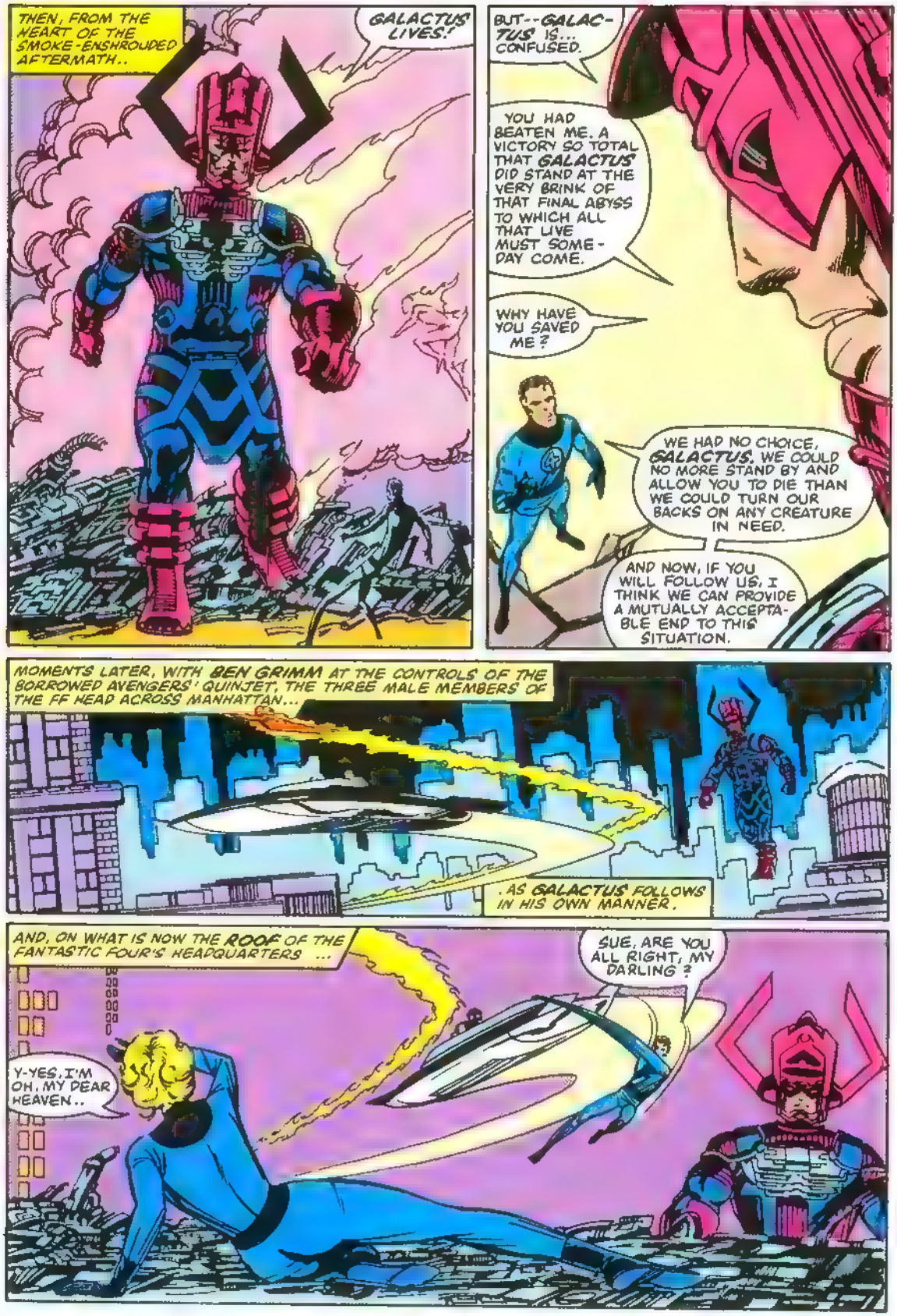

FROM DEEP WITHIN THE SACRED VALLEY THE ELEMENTAL FORCES FLOW ENERGY BEGINS TO CRACKLE ABOUT GALACTUS
GHOSTLY LIGHTS FLICKER ACROSS HIM, SOME FROM THE MECHANISM
SOME FROM THE VERY CORE OF THE STAR-BEING HIMSELF A PROCESS MUCH AKIN TO HEALING BEGINS...
GALACTUS STIRS.

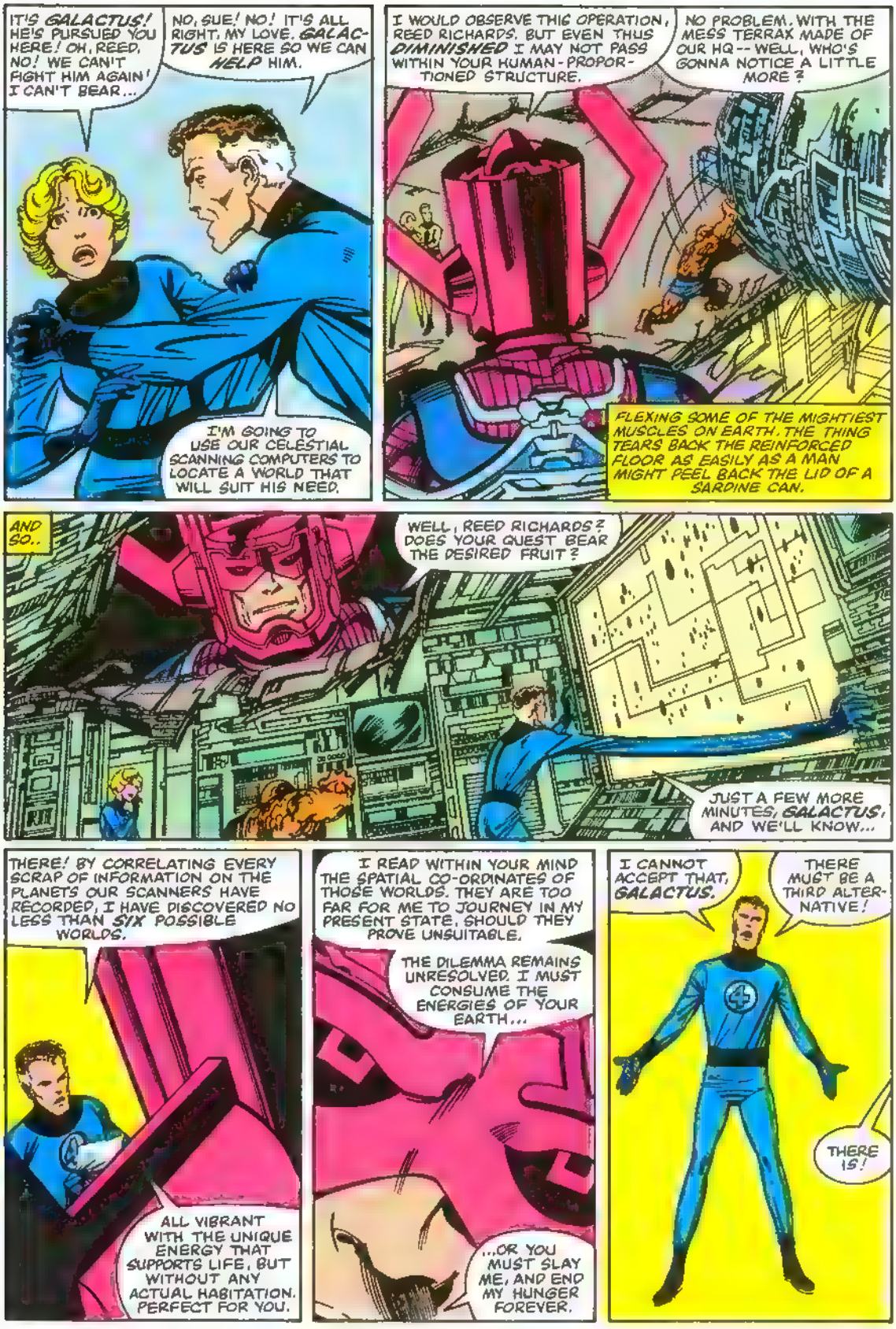

AND AT THAT MOMENT
BY THE HORDES OF HELA! THE MECHANISM DOTH DRAW POWER FASTER THAN THOR WOULD WISH
THE ROUSING TITAN HATH SEIZED UPON THE FORCES OF MY VERY LIFE, AND DOTH DRAIN THEM THROUGH MJOLNIR!


BUT BEFORE EVEN THOR HIMSELF HAS FULLY REALIZED HIS PREDICAMENT, THE STAR-SPANGLED VETERAN OF A THOUSAND BATTLES HAS MOVED INSTINCTIVELY.
DON'T WORRY, ASGARDIAN STARK INTERNATIONAL'S OVER-GROWN TINKERTOY'S ARE TOUGH
RRANG
BUT MY SHIELD IS TOUGHER!
UHNNN! CAPTAIN AMERICA! THOU HAST SURELY SAVED ME


THERE IS LITTLE TIME FOR GRATITUDE HOWEVER.
BOOM

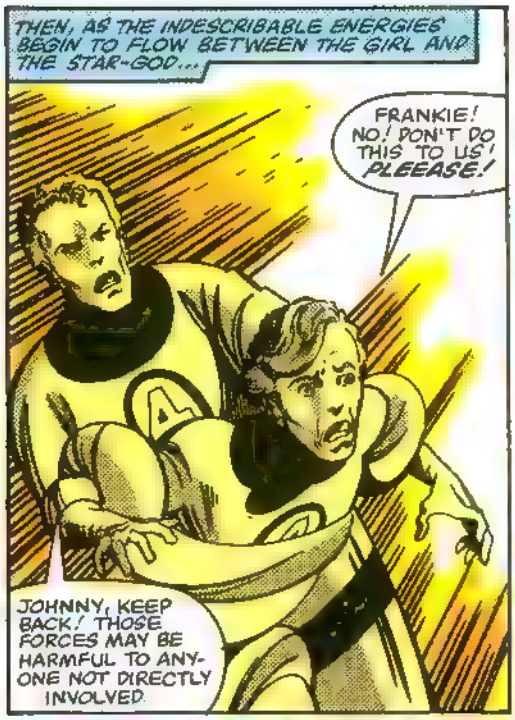
HOLY CATS! THE WHOLE BLAMED THING'S EXPLODED MEBBE I CAN HAUL GALACTUS OUTTA THERE BEFORE
NO BEN WAIT! ALL OF YOU STAND BACK! THERE ARE FORCES AT WORK HERE BEYOND HUMAN COMPREHENSION!


THEN, FROM THE HEART OF THE SMOKE-ENSHROUDED AFTERMATH..
GALACTUS LIVES!
BUT--GALACTUS IS... CONFUSED.
YOU HAD BEATEN ME. A VICTORY SO TOTAL THAT GALACTUS DID STAND AT THE VERY BRINK OF THAT FINAL ABYSS TO WHICH ALL THAT LIVE MUST SOMEDAY COME.
WHY HAVE YOU SAVED ME?
WE HAD NO CHOICE, GALACTUS. WE COULD NO MORE STAND BY AND ALLOW YOU TO DIE THAN WE COULD TURN OUR BACKS ON ANY CREATURE IN NEED.
AND NOW, IF YOU WILL FOLLOW US, I THINK WE CAN PROVIDE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE END TO THIS SITUATION.
MOMENTS LATER, WITH BEN GRIMM AT THE CONTROLS OF THE BORROWED AVENGERS' QUINJET, THE THREE MALE MEMBERS OF THE FF HEAD ACROSS MANHATTAN...
..AS GALACTUS FOLLOWS IN HIS OWN MANNER.
AND, ON WHAT IS NOW THE ROOF OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S HEADQUARTERS ...
SUE, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, MY DARLING?
Y-YES, I'M OH, MY DEAR HEAVEN..

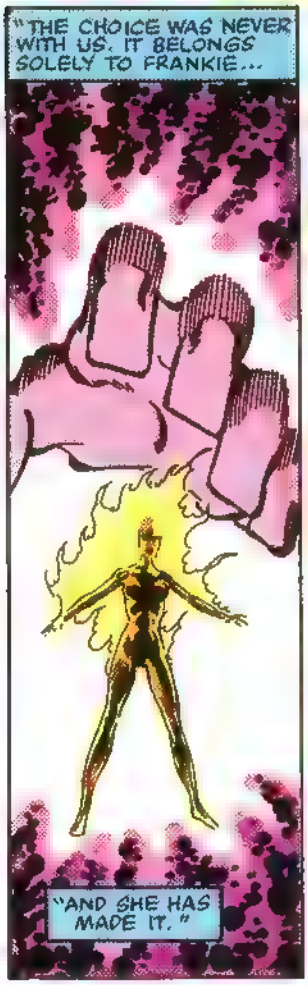

IT'S GALACTUS! HE'S PURSUED YOU HERE! OH, REED, NO! WE CAN'T FIGHT HIM AGAIN! I CAN'T BEAR...
NO, SUE! NO! IT'S ALL RIGHT, MY LOVE. GALACTUS IS HERE SO WE CAN HELP HIM.
I'M GOING TO USE OUR CELESTIAL SCANNING COMPUTERS TO LOCATE A WORLD THAT WILL SUIT HIS NEED.
I WOULD OBSERVE THIS OPERATION, REED RICHARDS. BUT EVEN THUS DIMINISHED I MAY NOT PASS WITHIN YOUR HUMAN-PROPORTIONED STRUCTURE.
NO PROBLEM. WITH THE MESS TERRAX MADE OF OUR HQ -- WELL, WHO'S GONNA NOTICE A LITTLE MORE?
FLEXING SOME OF THE MIGHTIEST MUSCLES ON EARTH, THE THING TEARS BACK THE REINFORCED FLOOR AS EASILY AS A MAN MIGHT PEEL BACK THE LID OF A SARDINE CAN.
AND SO..
WELL, REED RICHARDS? DOES YOUR QUEST BEAR THE DESIRED FRUIT?
JUST A FEW MORE MINUTES, GALACTUS, AND WE'LL KNOW...
THERE! BY CORRELATING EVERY SCRAP OF INFORMATION ON THE PLANETS OUR SCANNERS HAVE RECORDED, I HAVE DISCOVERED NO LESS THAN SIX POSSIBLE WORLDS.
ALL VIBRANT WITH THE UNIQUE ENERGY THAT SUPPORTS LIFE, BUT WITHOUT ANY ACTUAL HABITATION. PERFECT FOR YOU.
I READ WITHIN YOUR MIND THE SPATIAL CO-ORDINATES OF THOSE WORLDS. THEY ARE TOO FAR FOR ME TO JOURNEY IN MY PRESENT STATE. SHOULD THEY PROVE UNSUITABLE,
THE DILEMMA REMAINS UNRESOLVED. I MUST CONSUME THE ENERGIES OF YOUR EARTH...
...OR YOU MUST SLAY ME, AND END MY HUNGER FOREVER.
I CANNOT ACCEPT THAT, GALACTUS.
THERE MUST BE A THIRD ALTERNATIVE!
THERE IS!

THERE IS A THIRD ALTERNATIVE GALACTUS AND I CAN GIVE IT TO YOU
FRANKIE? WHAT IN THE WORLD...?
HEY, C'MON, BABE. I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU THINK YOU'RE UP TO, BUT IF REED CAN'T COME UP WITH THE ANSWER THERE'S NO WAY YOU CAN
DON'T BE SO CONDESCENDING, JOHNNY. I HAVE THE ANSWER. AN ANSWER ONLY I CAN GIVE - OR WOULD WANT TO
I'VE BEEN STUDYING THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S RECORDS. I KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU, GALACTUS. AND I KNOW HOW NORRIN RADD ALLOWED YOU TO TRANSFORM HIM INTO YOUR FIRST HERALD, THE SILVER SURFER SO YOU WOULD SPARE HIS HOME WORLD OF ZENN-LA.
I MAKE YOU THE SAME OFFER SPARE THE EARTH GALACTUS. AND TAKE ME AS YOUR NEW HERALD
INDEED?
FRANKIE, NO! ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND? DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?
STAY OUT OF THIS, JOHNNY. I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I'M DOING.
I DON'T THINK YOU TRULY DO, FRANKIE. AS THE HERALD OF GALACTUS IT WOULD BE YOUR TASK TO FIND WORLDS TO FEED HIS CONSTANT HUNGER. AND I FEAR THERE ARE FEW PLANETS WITH LIFE-SUSTAINING ENERGY, BUT NO LIFE ITSELF.
THERE WOULD INEVITABLY COME A TIME WHEN YOU WOULD HAVE TO LEAD HIM TO AN INHABITED WORLD
SO? A FEW LESS BUG-EYED MONSTERS? WHAT'S THAT COMPARED TO MY BEING ABLE TO GO... OUT THERE?

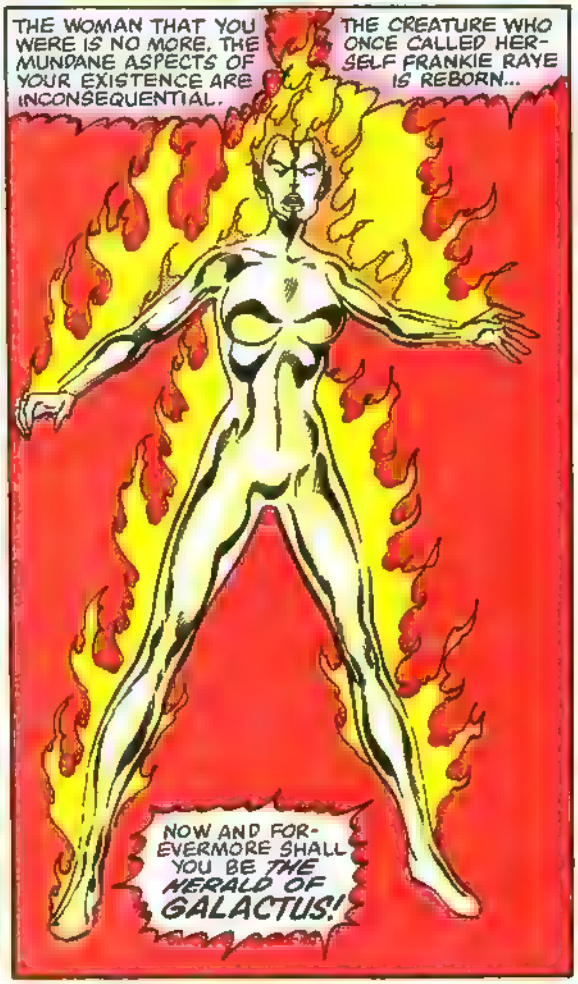
HER MOTIVATION IS AT LEAST ACCEPTABLE. TOO MANY TIMES BEFORE HAVE I CHOSEN A HERALD WHO CAME TO ME WITH NOBLE PURPOSE
SUCH PURITY OF HEART IS ILL-SUITED TO THE TASKS WHICH BEFALL MY HERALDS
SO DID I CHOOSE TERRAX, A MAN OF CORRUPTED MORALS AND EVIL NATURE. BUT THAT PROVED ONLY TO WORK AGAINST ME.
BUT THIS FEMALE HAS REASONS OF HER OWN, AND WOULD SUIT ME WELL.
NO! FRANKIE IS VERY NEARLY A MEMBER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR. EVEN WERE SHE NOT, MY RESPONSIBILITY TO HER WOULD NOT ALLOW ME TO AGREE TO THIS.
I FORBID IT, TOTALLY, GALACTUS.
IF I CHOOSE HER AS MY HERALD YOU WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO PREVENT ME, REED RICHARDS. BUT THE POINT IS MOOT. I HAVE NOT THE ENERGY TO SUITABLY EMPOWER HER.
I DON'T NEED "EMPOWERING", GALACTUS.
I HAVE POWER ENOUGH ALREADY!
FLAME ON!
THEN I ACCEPT YOUR OFFER, FRANKIE RAYE. YOU SHALL BE MY HERALD...
BUT FIRST MUST I ADAPT YOU FOR THE ROLE YOU HAVE CHOSEN...


THEN, AS THE INDESCRIBABLE ENERGIES BEGIN TO FLOW BETWEEN THE GIRL AND THE STAR-GOD...
FRANKIE! NO! DON'T DO THIS TO US! PLEEASE!
JOHNNY, KEEP BACK! THOSE FORCES MAY BE HARMFUL TO ANY-ONE NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED.

I'LL THROW OUT AN INVISIBLE FORCE FIELD BUBBLE. I DON'T KNOW IF IT WILL BLOCK THE POWER OF GALACTUS, BUT...
YEOW! LOOKIT HIM! HE'S ALL LIT UP LIKE SOME-THIN' OUT OF A C.B. DEMILLE MOVIE! THERE'S GOTTA BE SOMETHING WE CAN DO, REED.
THERE ...IS NOT.


"THE CHOICE WAS NEVER WITH US. IT BELONGS SOLELY TO FRANKIE...
"AND SHE HAS MADE IT."

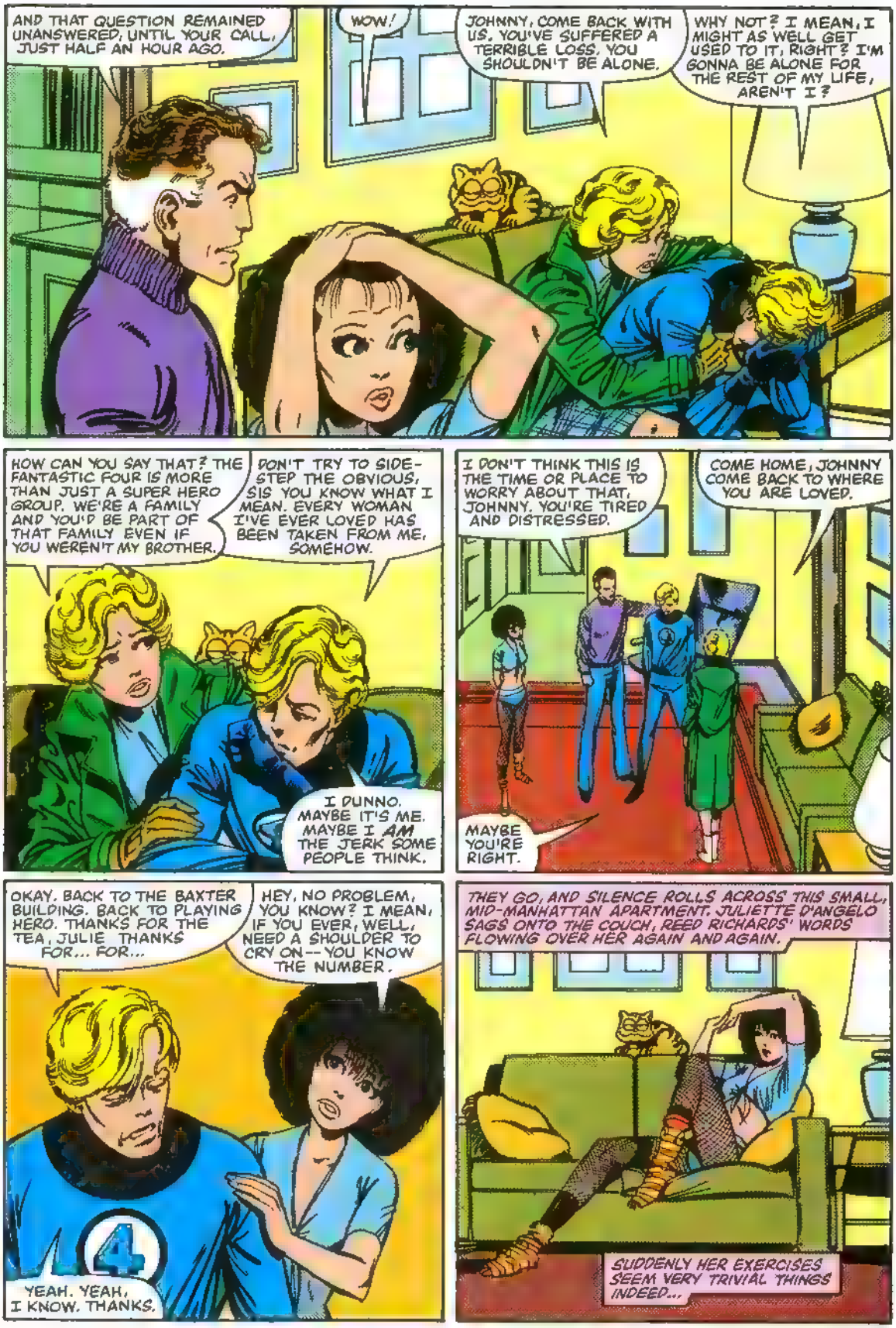
HEAR ME, MORTAL WOMAN! FEEL THE TOUCH OF GALAC-TUS IN YOUR MIND. DO NOT FLEE FROM MY PRESENCE.
ONLY GALACTUS CAN GUIDE YOU SAFELY THROUGH THE CORRI-DORS OF MADNESS AS YOUR HUMANITY SLIPS AWAY--SLIPS AWAY TO BE REPLACED BY SOME-THING GREATER!


THE WOMAN THAT YOU WERE IS NO MORE. THE MUNDANE ASPECTS OF YOUR EXISTENCE ARE INCONSEQUENTIAL.
THE CREATURE WHO ONCE CALLED HER-SELF FRANKIE RAYE IS REBORN...
NOW AND FOR-EVERMORE SHALL YOU BE THE HERALD OF GALACTUS!

F-FRANKIE? OH, BABE! WHAT HAS HE DONE TO YOU?
CAREFUL, JOHNNY. I THINK THERE'S VERY LITTLE OF FRANKIE RAYE LEFT THERE.
YOU'RE WRONG, REED. I'M STILL FRANKIE RAYE. BUT A NEWER, BETTER FRANKIE RAYE...
AND I'M FREE!
FRAAAANKIE!!!
JOHNNY, NO! AHHHH!
REED! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? JOHNNY'S FLAME...
MY UNIFORM PROTECTED ME FROM THE WORST OF IT, SUE. I'LL BE FINE...
"BUT I'M NOT SO CERTAIN ABOUT JOHNNY..."
FRANKIE, WAIT! PLEASE WAIT!
SHE FLIES ON, HEEDLESS OF HIS PLAINTIVE CRY, HIGHER AND HIGHER,
AS THE EARTH FALLS AWAY BELOW, IT IS NOW SUDDENLY, SOMEHOW TOTALLY UNIMPORTANT,

AND IF SHE IS EVEN AWARE OF JOHNNY STORM'S ANGUISHED PURSUIT SHE MAKES NO SIGN OR GESTURE TO SHOW IT.
THEN, WITH A FINAL AWESOME BURST OF SPEED SHE TRANSCENDS THE BOUNDS OF HER MORTAL LIFE...
..AND CROSSES THE FRONTIER OF SPACE
WHILE THE HUMAN TORCH, HAVING FLOWN HIGHER THAN THE THICK BLANKET OF AIR HE NEEDS TO FEED HIS FLAME, FALLS...
LOSING POWER... LOSING CONSCIOUSNESS.. GOTTA HOLD ON.. GOTTA KEEP AFLAME...
AND FRANKIE RAYE
IF THERE TRULY STILL EXISTS A BEING BY THAT NAME SHE IS A SMALL AND TRIVIAL PART OF THE GOLDEN COMET WHICH NOW STREAKS AWAY FROM OUR SOLAR SYSTEM.
THIS IS NO LONGER A FRAIL CREATURE OF THE DWINDLING EARTH...
..HER HOME IS NOW THE UNIVERSE!

BACK ON EARTH
WELL, GALACTUS, YOU HAVE YOUR HERALD I DON'T THINK WE WILL EVER KNOW IF THIS WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO, OR IF WE SHOULD HAVE TRIED SOMETHING; ANYTHING; TO STOP YOU FROM TAKING HER
I DID NOT "TAKE HER", REED RICHARDS. SHE CHOSE A PATH SHE HAS LONG HUNGERED TO TRED, I TOUCHED HER MIND. I KNOW THIS TO BE TRUE.
AND TRUE ALSO WAS MY VOW, MY PACT WITH HER. THE WOMAN IS MY HERALD AND SO SHALL EARTH REMAIN INVIOLATE.
YET, PERHAPS THERE IS ANOTHER REASON I STAY MY HAND. A DEEPER, TRUER REASON.
PERHAPS IT IS BECAUSE YOU RISKED ALL TO SAVE ME, WHEN IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASY TO DO OTHERWISE.
PERHAPS GALACTUS HAS LEARNED AN IMPORTANT TRUTH THIS DAY. EARTH SHALL NEVER MORE NEED FEAR ME...
FOR PERHAPS HERE, ON THIS TINY WHIRLING MOTE ALONE IN ALL THE COSMOS HAS GALACTUS TRULY FOUND THOSE HE MIGHT DARE NAME... FRIENDS.
THE CARRIER NIMBUS BILLOWS AROUND HIS GIANT FORM, AND GALACTUS IS GONE.
IT'S OVER! GALACTUS WILL NOT TROUBLE US AGAIN! PERHAPS HIS HUMANITY IS NOT SO LOST AS HE MIGHT THINK, IF HE CAN STILL BE TOUCHED BY SIMPLE HUMAN COMPASSION.
I THINK I'M IMPRESSED.
BUT... BUT, REED, WHERE'S THE TORCH? WHERE IS JOHNNY?


AND THAT QUESTION REMAINED UNANSWERED, UNTIL YOUR CALL, JUST HALF AN HOUR AGO.
WOW!
JOHNNY, COME BACK WITH US, YOU'VE SUFFERED A TERRIBLE LOSS, YOU SHOULDN'T BE ALONE.
WHY NOT? I MEAN, I MIGHT AS WELL GET USED TO IT, RIGHT? I'M GONNA BE ALONE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE, AREN'T I?
HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT? THE FANTASTIC FOUR IS MORE THAN JUST A SUPER HERO GROUP. WE'RE A FAMILY AND YOU'D BE PART OF THAT FAMILY EVEN IF YOU WEREN'T MY BROTHER.
DON'T TRY TO SIDE-STEP THE OBVIOUS, SIS YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. EVERY WOMAN I'VE EVER LOVED HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM ME, SOMEHOW.
I DUNNO. MAYBE IT'S ME. MAYBE I AM THE JERK SOME PEOPLE THINK.
I DON'T THINK THIS IS THE TIME OR PLACE TO WORRY ABOUT THAT, JOHNNY. YOU'RE TIRED AND DISTRESSED.
COME HOME, JOHNNY COME BACK TO WHERE YOU ARE LOVED.
MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT.
OKAY. BACK TO THE BAXTER BUILDING. BACK TO PLAYING HERO. THANKS FOR THE TEA, JULIE THANKS FOR... FOR...
HEY, NO PROBLEM, YOU KNOW? I MEAN, IF YOU EVER, WELL, NEED A SHOULDER TO CRY ON -- YOU KNOW THE NUMBER.
YEAH. YEAH, I KNOW. THANKS.
THEY GO, AND SILENCE ROLLS ACROSS THIS SMALL, MID-MANHATTAN APARTMENT. JULIETTE D'ANGELO SAGS ONTO THE COUCH, REED RICHARDS' WORDS FLOWING OVER HER AGAIN AND AGAIN.
SUDDENLY HER EXERCISES SEEM VERY TRIVIAL THINGS INDEED...

FRAGMENTS
I... AM DYING...

SUCH A THING IS NEARLY INCOMPREHENSIBLE MANY TIMES HAVE I COME UNDER THE SHADOW OF *DEATH'S* DARK WING

BUT NEVER HAVE MY VITAL ENERGY SUPPLIES SLIPPED SO LOW TOO MANY TIMES IN RECENT MONTHS HAVE I STAYED MY HAND, AND SPARED A WORLD WHOSE *LIFE ENERGIES* MIGHT HAVE REPLENISHED ME

FEELINGS I HAD THOUGHT LONG DEAD WITHIN ME HAVE STIRRED AGAIN, AND THE PRICE THEY NOW EXACT IS TERRIBLE INDEED

AM I NOT *GALACTUS*? AM I NOT HE WHOSE VERY NAME IS SPOKEN ONLY IN DREAD WHISPERS THROUGHOUT THE FARTHEST REACHES OF THE UNENDING UNIVERSE? AM I NOT THE RAVAGER, THE DEVOURER OF WORLDS?

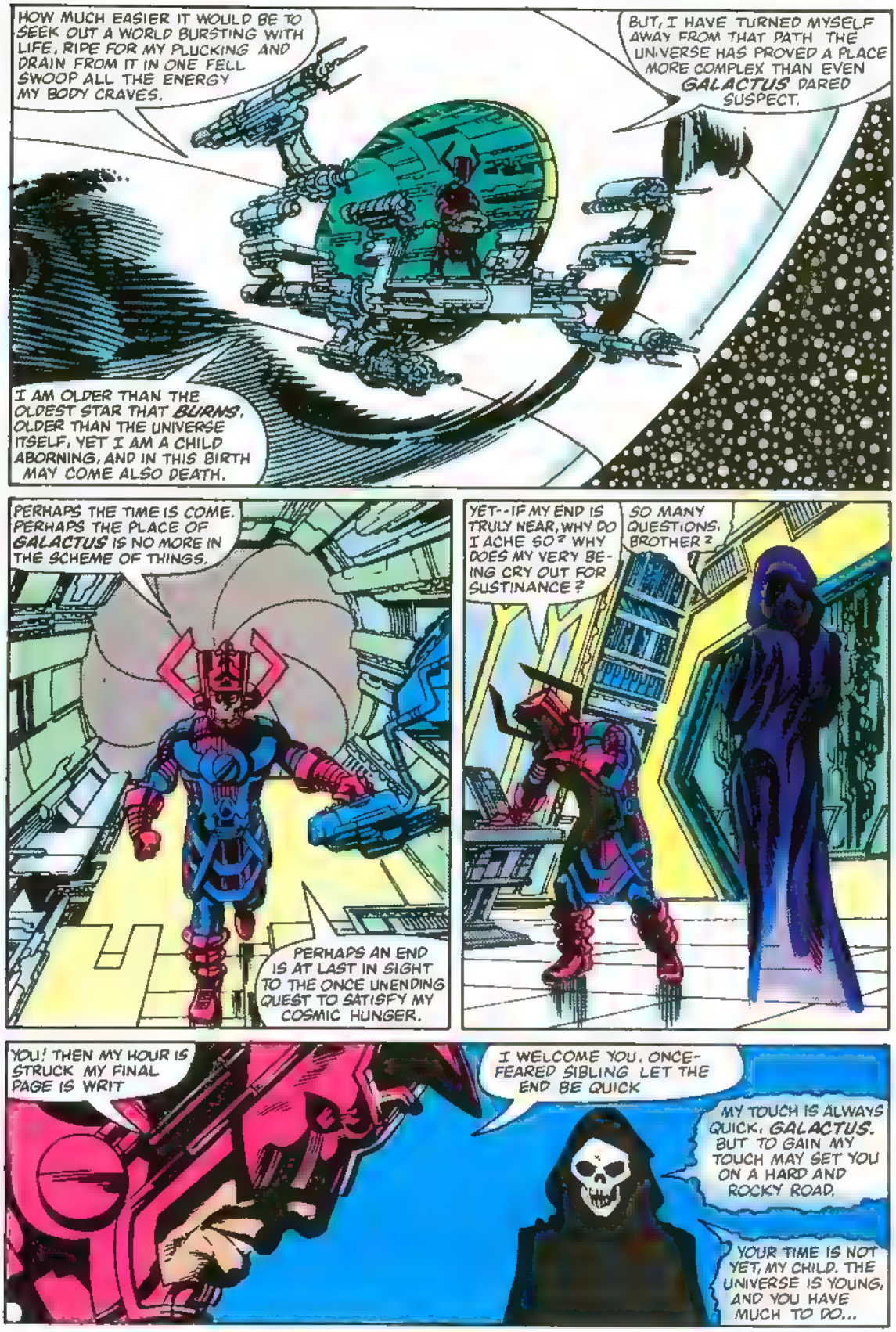
YET ONCE, TWENTY BILLION YEARS AGO, WAS I NOT ALSO A *MAN*, AS MORTAL AS ANY CREATURE THAT CRAWLS UPON A PLANET'S CRAGGY FACE? I HAD THOUGHT THAT THAT MAN WAS AS DEAD AS THE UNIVERSE WHICH BIRTHED HIM I HAD *PRAYED* IT MIGHT BE SO.

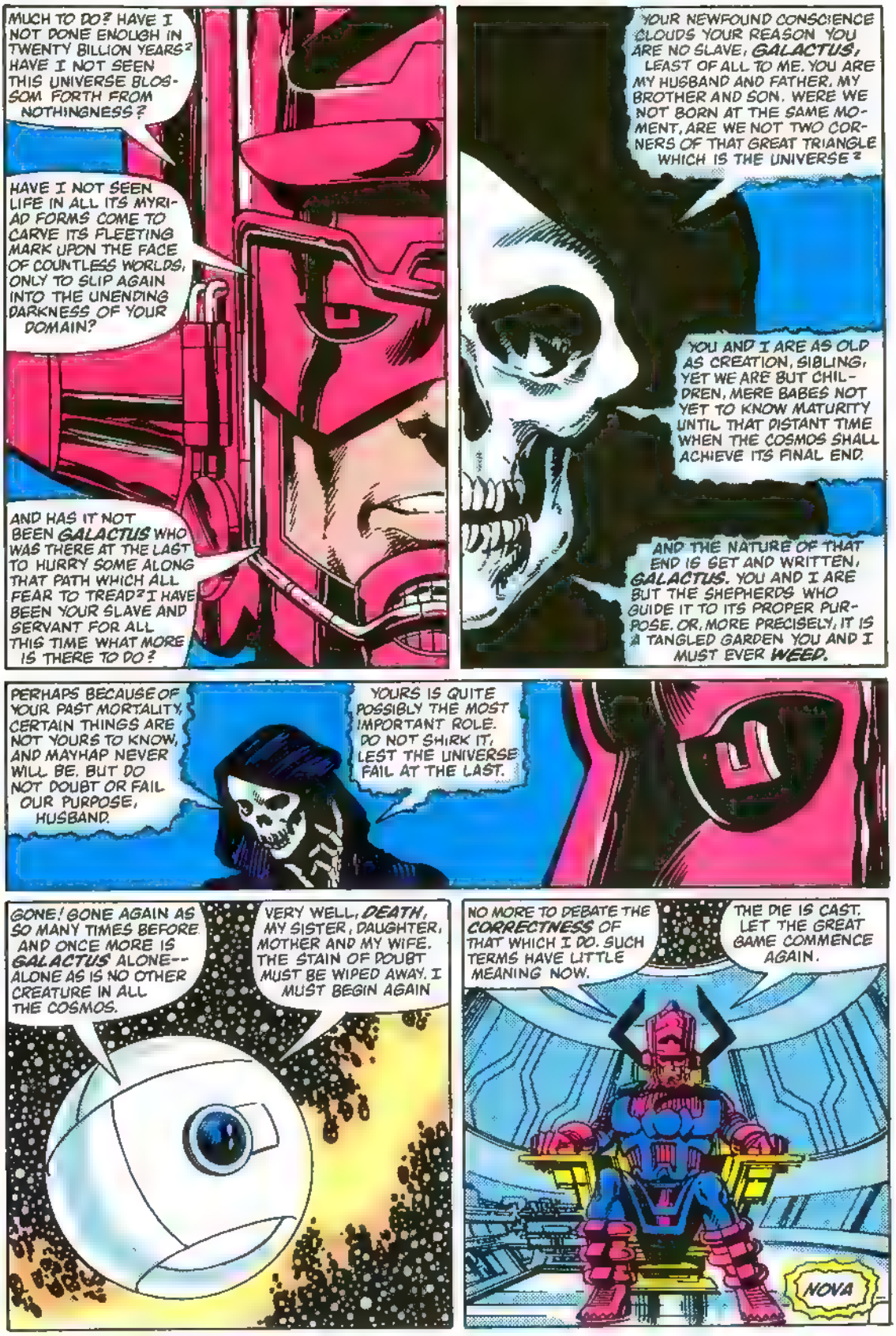
BUT NOW HIS *GHOST* RETURNS, AND WITH IT COMES THAT SPECTER THAT ONE SUCH AS *GALACTUS* CANNOT DARE FACE--*COMPASSION*.

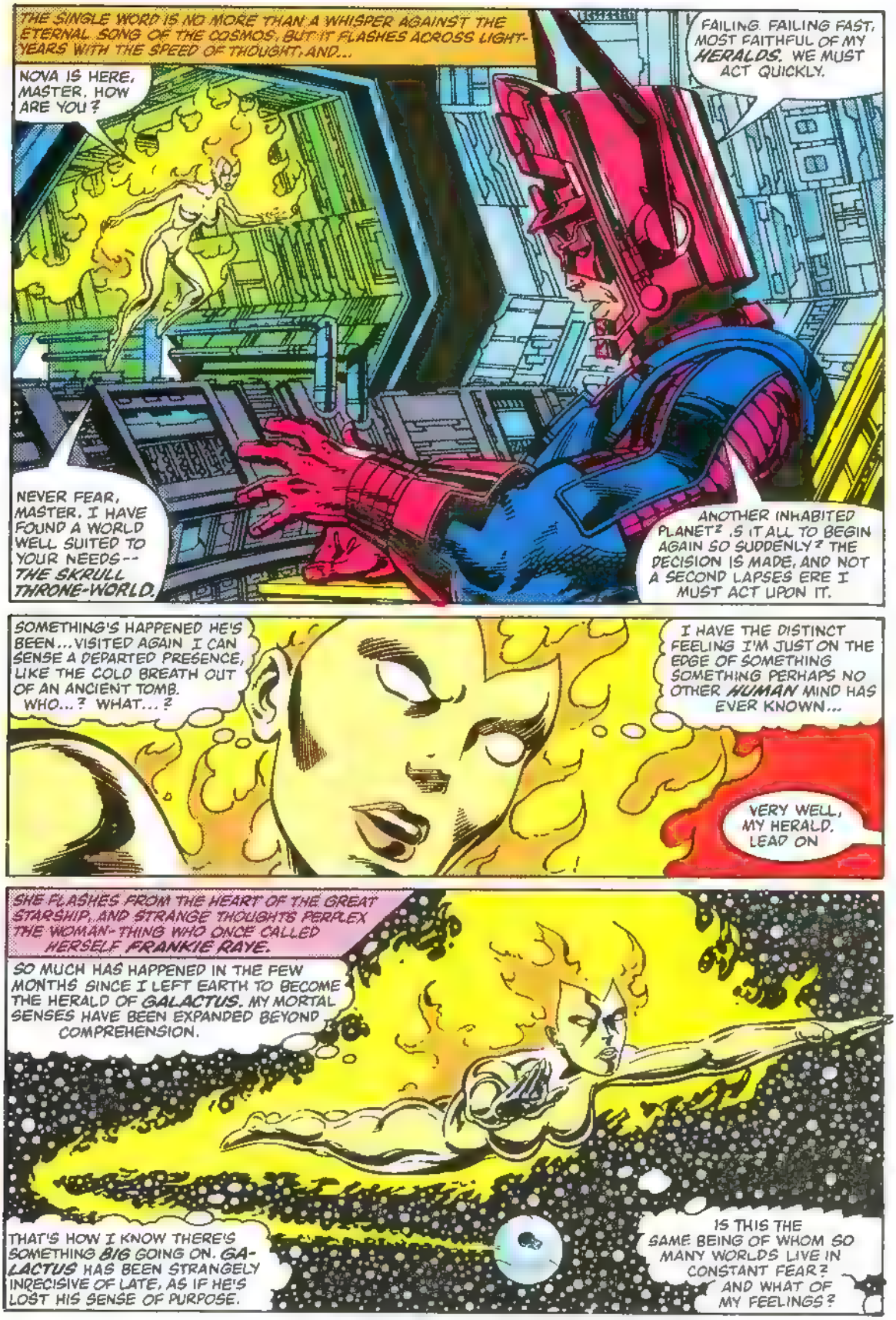
"LOOK YOU UNCARING COSMOS SEE HOW THIS MADNESS HAS DRIVEN ME--DRIVEN ME TO SEEK NEW SOURCES OF NOURISHMENT

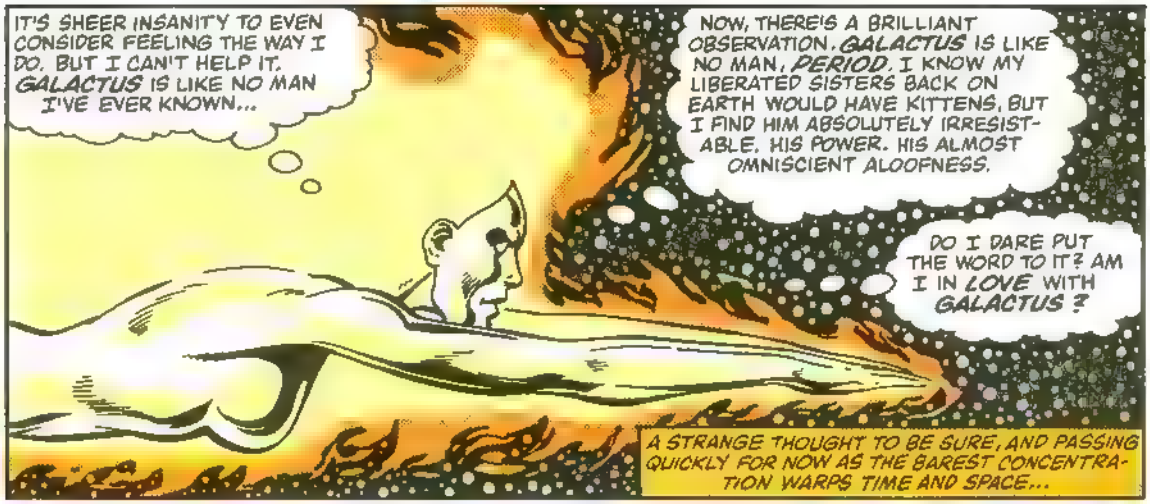
"THE LONG ARMS OF MY SHIP DRAW IN COUNTLESS THOUSANDS OF CUBIC MILES OF THE ATMOSPHERE OF YONDER GAS GIANT. MY MECHANISMS STRIVE TO CONVERT THE MATERIAL TO SUBSTANCES THAT WILL SUSTAIN ME.

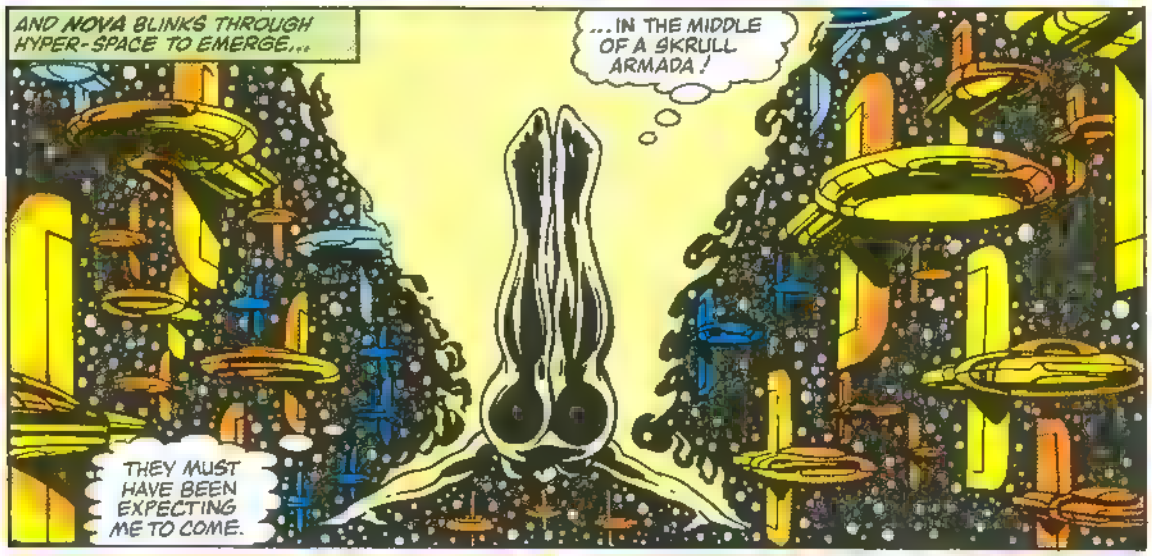
"MY TINY, ROBOT PROBES SKIM THE SURFACES OF BLASTED CRATERED MOONS SEEKING IN ABSOLUTE LIFELESSNESS THE SINGLE SPARK OF LIFE-ENERGY WHICH MIGHT GRANT ME ANOTHER DAY ANOTHER HOUR OF LIFE!

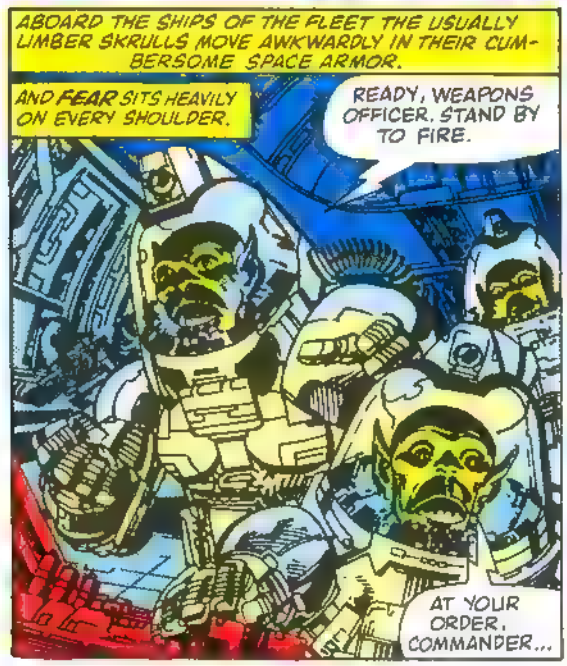

HOW MUCH EASIER IT WOULD BE TO SEEK OUT A WORLD BURSTING WITH LIFE, RIPE FOR MY PLUCKING AND DRAIN FROM IT IN ONE FELL SWOOP ALL THE ENERGY MY BODY CRAVES.
BUT, I HAVE TURNED MYSELF AWAY FROM THAT PATH. THE UNIVERSE HAS PROVED A PLACE MORE COMPLEX THAN EVEN GALACTUS DARED SUSPECT.
I AM OLDER THAN THE OLDEST STAR THAT BURNS, OLDER THAN THE UNIVERSE ITSELF, YET I AM A CHILD ABORNING, AND IN THIS BIRTH MAY COME ALSO DEATH.
PERHAPS THE TIME IS COME. PERHAPS THE PLACE OF GALACTUS IS NO MORE IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS.
PERHAPS AN END IS AT LAST IN SIGHT TO THE ONCE UNENDING QUEST TO SATISFY MY COSMIC HUNGER.
YET--IF MY END IS TRULY NEAR, WHY DO I ACHE SO? WHY DOES MY VERY BEING CRY OUT FOR SUSTINANCE?
SO MANY QUESTIONS, BROTHER?
YOU! THEN MY HOUR IS STRUCK. MY FINAL PAGE IS WRIT
I WELCOME YOU, ONCE-FEARED SIBLING. LET THE END BE QUICK
MY TOUCH IS ALWAYS QUICK, GALACTUS. BUT TO GAIN MY TOUCH MAY SET YOU ON A HARD AND ROCKY ROAD.
YOUR TIME IS NOT YET, MY CHILD. THE UNIVERSE IS YOUNG, AND YOU HAVE MUCH TO DO...


MUCH TO DO? HAVE I NOT DONE ENOUGH IN TWENTY BILLION YEARS? HAVE I NOT SEEN THIS UNIVERSE BLOSSOM FORTH FROM NOTHINGNESS?
HAVE I NOT SEEN LIFE IN ALL ITS MYRIAD FORMS COME TO CARVE ITS FLEETING MARK UPON THE FACE OF COUNTLESS WORLDS, ONLY TO SLIP AGAIN INTO THE UNENDING DARKNESS OF YOUR DOMAIN?
AND HAS IT NOT BEEN GALACTUS WHO WAS THERE AT THE LAST TO HURRY SOME ALONG THAT PATH WHICH ALL FEAR TO TREAD? I HAVE BEEN YOUR SLAVE AND SERVANT FOR ALL THIS TIME. WHAT MORE IS THERE TO DO?
YOUR NEWFOUND CONSCIENCE CLOUDS YOUR REASON. YOU ARE NO SLAVE, GALACTUS, LEAST OF ALL TO ME. YOU ARE MY HUSBAND AND FATHER, MY BROTHER AND SON. WERE WE NOT BORN AT THE SAME MOMENT, ARE WE NOT TWO CORNERS OF THAT GREAT TRIANGLE WHICH IS THE UNIVERSE?
YOU AND I ARE AS OLD AS CREATION, SIBLING, YET WE ARE BUT CHILDREN, MERE BABES NOT YET TO KNOW MATURITY UNTIL THAT DISTANT TIME WHEN THE COSMOS SHALL ACHIEVE ITS FINAL END.
AND THE NATURE OF THAT END IS SET AND WRITTEN, GALACTUS. YOU AND I ARE BUT THE SHEPHERDS WHO GUIDE IT TO ITS PROPER PURPOSE. OR, MORE PRECISELY, IT IS A TANGLED GARDEN YOU AND I MUST EVER WEED.
PERHAPS BECAUSE OF YOUR PAST MORTALITY, CERTAIN THINGS ARE NOT YOURS TO KNOW, AND MAYHAP NEVER WILL BE. BUT DO NOT DOUBT OR FAIL OUR PURPOSE, HUSBAND.
YOURS IS QUITE POSSIBLY THE MOST IMPORTANT ROLE. DO NOT SHIRK IT, LEST THE UNIVERSE FAIL AT THE LAST.
GONE! GONE AGAIN AS SO MANY TIMES BEFORE AND ONCE MORE IS GALACTUS ALONE--ALONE AS IS NO OTHER CREATURE IN ALL THE COSMOS.
VERY WELL, DEATH, MY SISTER, DAUGHTER, MOTHER AND MY WIFE. THE STAIN OF DOUBT MUST BE WIPED AWAY. I MUST BEGIN AGAIN
NO MORE TO DEBATE THE CORRECTNESS OF THAT WHICH I DO. SUCH TERMS HAVE LITTLE MEANING NOW.
THE DIE IS CAST. LET THE GREAT GAME COMMENCE AGAIN.
NOVA

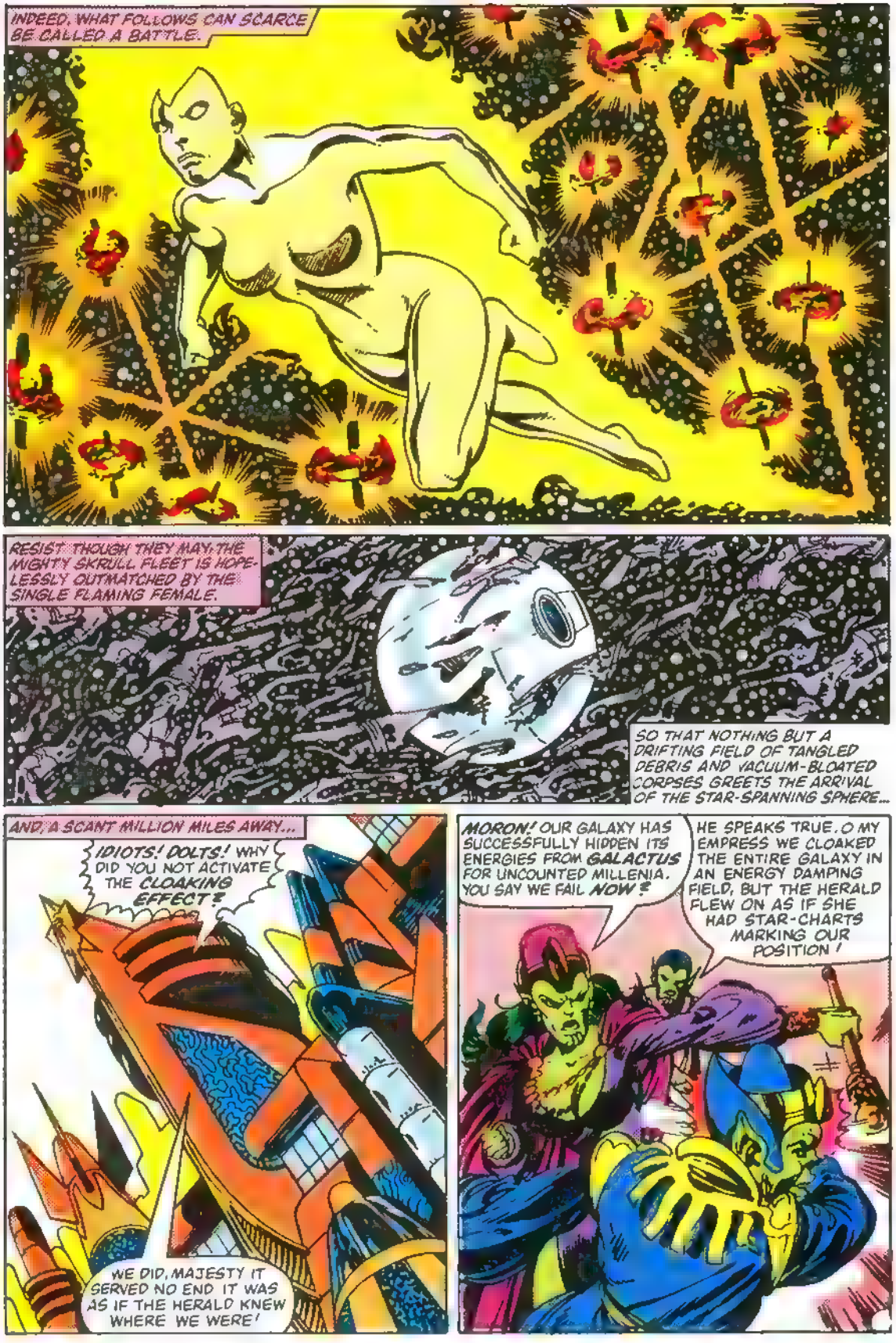

THE SINGLE WORD IS NO MORE THAN A WHISPER AGAINST THE ETERNAL SONG OF THE COSMOS, BUT IT FLASHES ACROSS LIGHT-YEARS WITH THE SPEED OF THOUGHT, AND...
NOVA IS HERE, MASTER. HOW ARE YOU?
FAILING. FAILING FAST, MOST FAITHFUL OF MY HERALDS. WE MUST ACT QUICKLY.
NEVER FEAR, MASTER. I HAVE FOUND A WORLD WELL SUITED TO YOUR NEEDS-- THE SKRULL THRONE-WORLD.
ANOTHER INHABITED PLANET? IS IT ALL TO BEGIN AGAIN SO SUDDENLY? THE DECISION IS MADE, AND NOT A SECOND LAPSES ERE I MUST ACT UPON IT.
SOMETHING'S HAPPENED HE'S BEEN... VISITED AGAIN I CAN SENSE A DEPARTED PRESENCE, LIKE THE COLD BREATH OUT OF AN ANCIENT TOMB. WHO...? WHAT...?
I HAVE THE DISTINCT FEELING I'M JUST ON THE EDGE OF SOMETHING SOMETHING PERHAPS NO OTHER HUMAN MIND HAS EVER KNOWN...
VERY WELL, MY HERALD. LEAD ON
SHE FLASHES FROM THE HEART OF THE GREAT STARSHIP, AND STRANGE THOUGHTS PERPLEX THE WOMAN-THING WHO ONCE CALLED HERSELF FRANKIE RAYE.
SO MUCH HAS HAPPENED IN THE FEW MONTHS SINCE I LEFT EARTH TO BECOME THE HERALD OF GALACTUS. MY MORTAL SENSES HAVE BEEN EXPANDED BEYOND COMPREHENSION.
THAT'S HOW I KNOW THERE'S SOMETHING BIG GOING ON. GALACTUS HAS BEEN STRANGELY INDECISIVE OF LATE, AS IF HE'S LOST HIS SENSE OF PURPOSE.
IS THIS THE SAME BEING OF WHOM SO MANY WORLDS LIVE IN CONSTANT FEAR? AND WHAT OF MY FEELINGS?


IT'S SHEER INSANITY TO EVEN CONSIDER FEELING THE WAY I DO. BUT I CAN'T HELP IT. GALACTUS IS LIKE NO MAN I'VE EVER KNOWN...
NOW, THERE'S A BRILLIANT OBSERVATION. GALACTUS IS LIKE NO MAN, PERIOD. I KNOW MY LIBERATED SISTERS BACK ON EARTH WOULD HAVE KITTENS, BUT I FIND HIM ABSOLUTELY IRRESISTABLE. HIS POWER. HIS ALMOST OMNISCIENT ALOOFNESS.
DO I DARE PUT THE WORD TO IT? AM I IN LOVE WITH GALACTUS?
A STRANGE THOUGHT TO BE SURE, AND PASSING QUICKLY FOR NOW AS THE BAREST CONCENTRATION WARPS TIME AND SPACE...


AND NOVA BLINKS THROUGH HYPER-SPACE TO EMERGE...
...IN THE MIDDLE OF A SKRULL ARMADA!
THEY MUST HAVE BEEN EXPECTING ME TO COME.

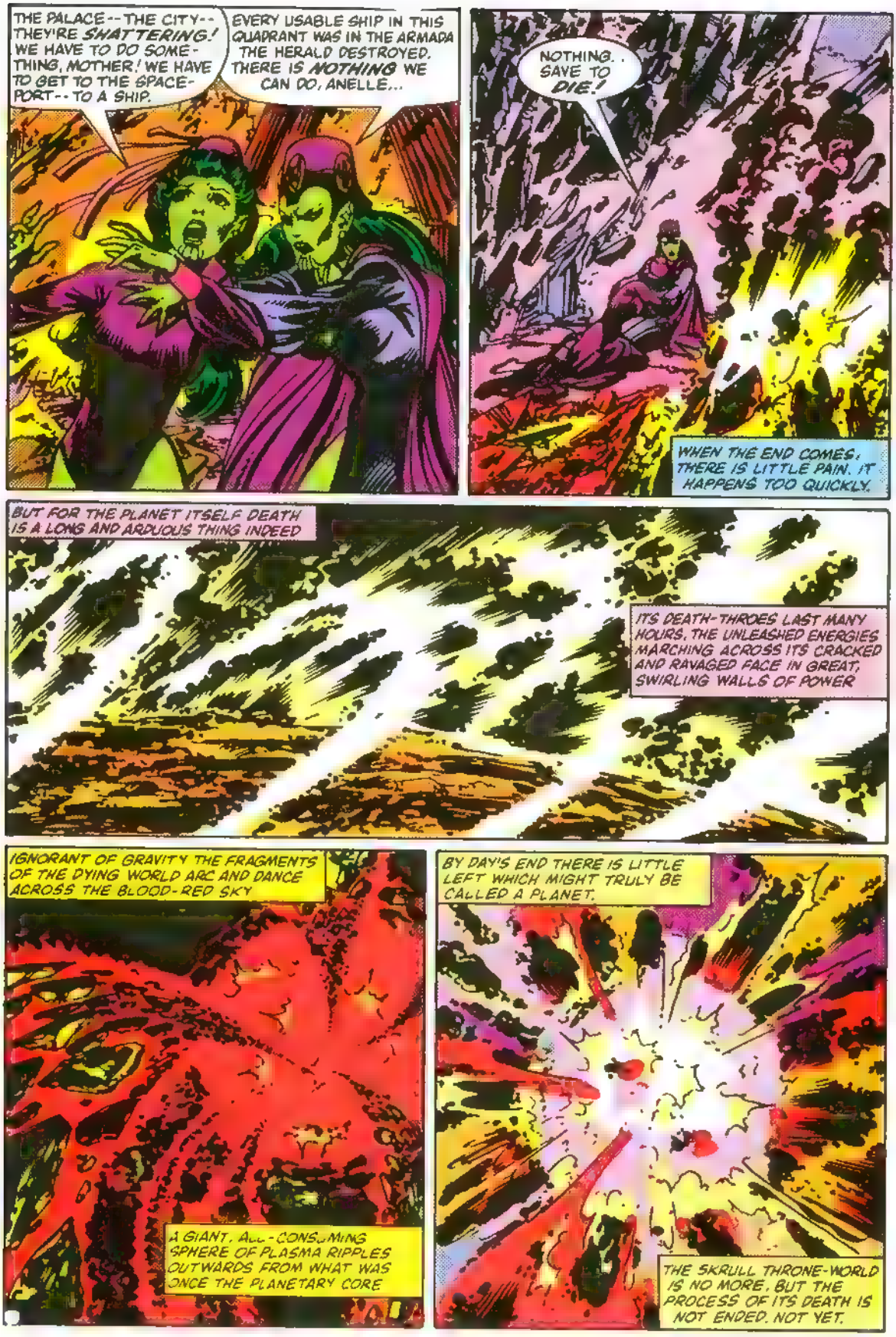

ABOARD THE SHIPS OF THE FLEET THE USUALLY LIMBER SKRULLS MOVE AWKWARDLY IN THEIR CUMBERSOME SPACE ARMOR.
AND FEAR SITS HEAVILY ON EVERY SHOULDER.
READY, WEAPONS OFFICER. STAND BY TO FIRE.
AT YOUR ORDER, COMMANDER...

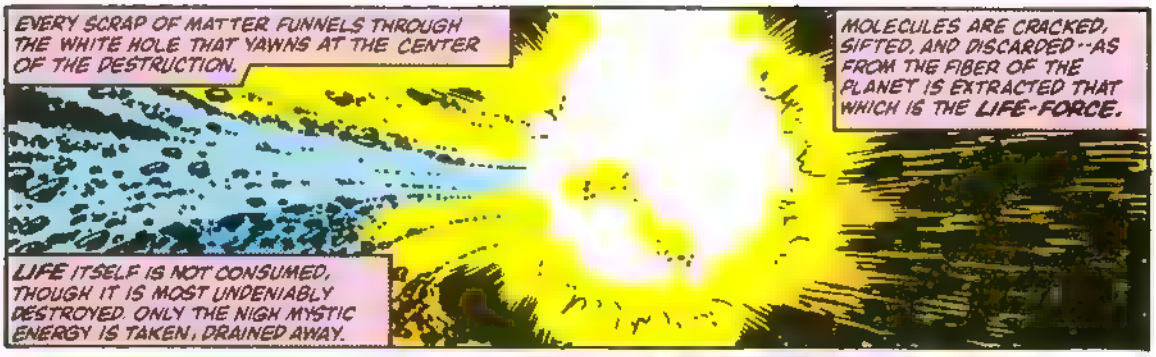
THE WORD IS NEVER SPOKEN
NOVA'S FLAME INTENSIFIES TO THE POWER OF HER NAME-SAKE...
AND THE FIRST SKRULL SHIP PERISHES WITHOUT EVER KNOWING BATTLE.
THE FOOLS! DO THEY REALLY THINK THEY STAND A CHANCE AGAINST THE HERALD OF GALACTUS?

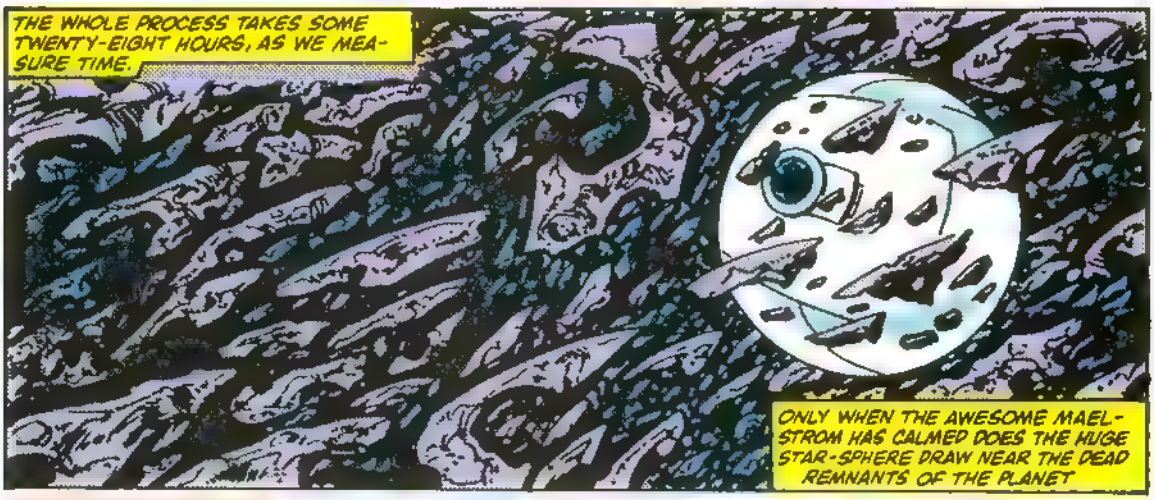

INDEED, WHAT FOLLOWS CAN SCARCE BE CALLED A BATTLE.
RESIST THOUGH THEY MAY, THE MIGHTY SKRULL FLEET IS HOPELESSLY OUTMATCHED BY THE SINGLE FLAMING FEMALE.
SO THAT NOTHING BUT A DRIFTING FIELD OF TANGLED DEBRIS AND VACUUM-BLOATED CORPSES GREETS THE ARRIVAL OF THE STAR-SPANNING SPHERE...
AND, A SCANT MILLION MILES AWAY...
IDIOTS! DOLTS! WHY DID YOU NOT ACTIVATE THE CLOAKING EFFECT?
WE DID, MAJESTY IT SERVED NO END IT WAS AS IF THE HERALD KNEW WHERE WE WERE!
MORON! OUR GALAXY HAS SUCCESSFULLY HIDDEN ITS ENERGIES FROM GALACTUS FOR UNCOUNTED MILLENIA. YOU SAY WE FAIL NOW?
HE SPEAKS TRUE, O MY EMPRESS WE CLOAKED THE ENTIRE GALAXY IN AN ENERGY DAMPING FIELD, BUT THE HERALD FLEW ON AS IF SHE HAD STAR-CHARTS MARKING OUR POSITION!

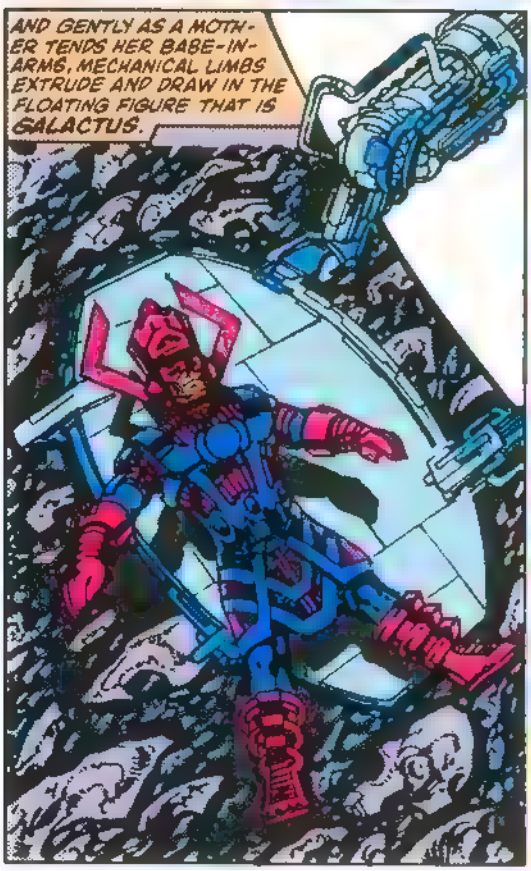
MOTHER! THE WHOLE PALACE IS IN AN UPROAR! WHAT IS HAPPENING?
ANELLE! DAUGHTER, I HAD HOPED YOU WERE YET IN BED BETTER THAT YOU SHOULD SLEEP PEACEFULLY THROUGH THE END OF THE WORLD!
WHAT? WHAT DO YOU MEAN? HAVE THE ACCURSED KREE LAUNCHED AN ATTACK? IS OUR DEFENSE SCREEN BREECHED?
FAR WORSE THAN THAT, DAUGHTER THE KREE WE WOULD SWEEP FROM OUR SKIES LIKE THE GNATS THEY ARE BUT THERE IS ONE MENACE EVEN THE MIGHT OF THE SKRULL EMPIRE MUST FEAR.
N-NO.. YOU CANNOT MEAN...
"I DO. LOOK TO THE STREET BELOW. SEE HOW EVEN THE CARRIER NIMBUS BILLOWS.
"WE CAN HIDE FROM HIM NO MORE GALACTUS HAS COME!
"OUR FATE IS SEALED."
YET EVEN IN THEIR DARKEST HOUR SOME SKRULLS DO NOT GIVE UP--NOT YET
WITH A WHINE LIKE TEN BILL ON ANGRY WASPS A SQUADRON OF FIGHTERS LEAPS INTO THE AIR, THEIR ARMAMENT BRISTLING...

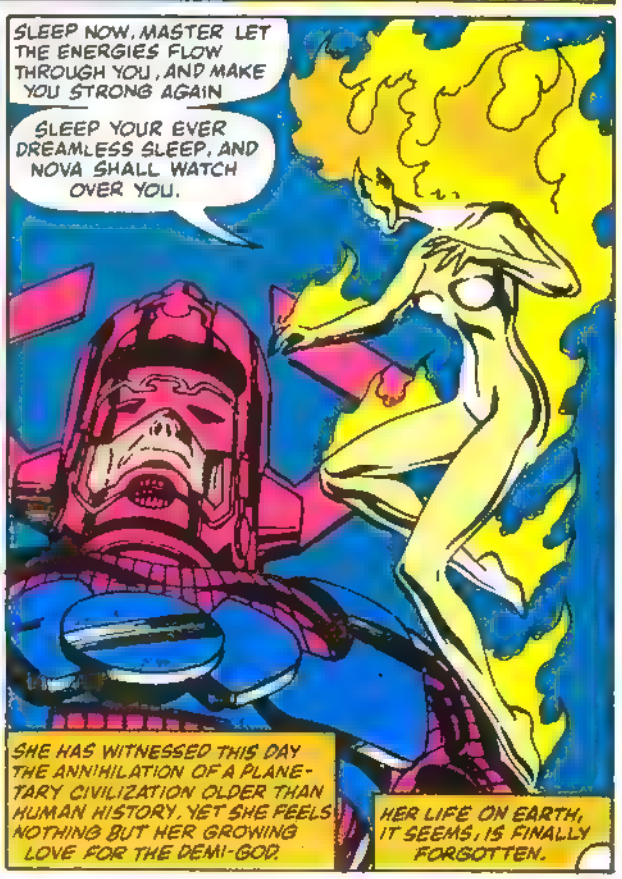
ENOUGH DESTRUCTIVE FORCE TO LAY WASTE THE ENTIRE CITY BLASTS AGAINST GALACTUS, WAVE AFTER THUNDERING WAVE.
BUT IF HE IS EVEN AWARE OF THE ASSAULT THE DEMI-GOD GIVES NO SIGN, NO GESTURE.
IN FACT, IN THE MIDST OF CONFLAGRATION HE SEEMS ALMOST AT PEACE.
HE SEEMS TO DO NOTHING, YET THE WORKS OF THE SKRULLS PEEL BACK BENEATH HIS FEET LIKE THE SKIN OF SOME OVER-RIPE FRUIT
ALMOST INSTANTLY THE GROUND BELOW BOILS INTO MOLTEN LAVA, AND GALACTUS SINKS UNCARING INTO THE SEARING CAULDRON.
ANY SKRULL CLOSE ENOUGH TO GLIMPSE HIS FACE BEFORE GALACTUS SINKS FROM SIGHT MIGHT WELL BE AT A LOSS TO COMPREHEND HIS BEATIFIC EXPRESSION.
THAT ENIGMATIC FACE WILL BE THE LAST ANY SKRULL OF THIS WORLD WILL SEE OF GALACTUS.
THE NEXT MOMENT THE SURFACE OF THE ENTIRE THRONE-WORLD TEARS ITSELF APART, AND THE FURIES OF THE INNER WORLD ARE SET FREE.


THE PALACE--THE CITY--THEY'RE SHATTERING! WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING, MOTHER! WE HAVE TO GET TO THE SPACEPORT--TO A SHIP.
EVERY USABLE SHIP IN THIS QUADRANT WAS IN THE ARMADA THE HERALD DESTROYED. THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO, ANELLE...
NOTHING. . SAVE TO DIE!
WHEN THE END COMES, THERE IS LITTLE PAIN. IT HAPPENS TOO QUICKLY.
BUT FOR THE PLANET ITSELF DEATH IS A LONG AND ARDUOUS THING INDEED
ITS DEATH-THROES LAST MANY HOURS, THE UNLEASHED ENERGIES MARCHING ACROSS ITS CRACKED AND RAVAGED FACE IN GREAT, SWIRLING WALLS OF POWER
IGNORANT OF GRAVITY THE FRAGMENTS OF THE DYING WORLD ARC AND DANCE ACROSS THE BLOOD-RED SKY
A GIANT, ALL-CONSUMING SPHERE OF PLASMA RIPPLES OUTWARDS FROM WHAT WAS ONCE THE PLANETARY CORE
BY DAY'S END THERE IS LITTLE LEFT WHICH MIGHT TRULY BE CALLED A PLANET.
THE SKRULL THRONE-WORLD IS NO MORE. BUT THE PROCESS OF ITS DEATH IS NOT ENDED. NOT YET.


EVERY SCRAP OF MATTER FUNNELS THROUGH THE WHITE HOLE THAT YAWNS AT THE CENTER OF THE DESTRUCTION.
MOLECULES ARE CRACKED, SIFTED, AND DISCARDED--AS FROM THE FIBER OF THE PLANET IS EXTRACTED THAT WHICH IS THE LIFE-FORCE.
LIFE ITSELF IS NOT CONSUMED, THOUGH IT IS MOST UNDENIABLY DESTROYED. ONLY THE NIGH MYSTIC ENERGY IS TAKEN, DRAINED AWAY.


THE WHOLE PROCESS TAKES SOME TWENTY-EIGHT HOURS, AS WE MEASURE TIME.
ONLY WHEN THE AWESOME MAELSTROM HAS CALMED DOES THE HUGE STAR-SPHERE DRAW NEAR THE DEAD REMNANTS OF THE PLANET


AND GENTLY AS A MOTHER TENDS HER BABE-IN-ARMS, MECHANICAL LIMBS EXTRUDE AND DRAW IN THE FLOATING FIGURE THAT IS GALACTUS.


SLEEP NOW, MASTER LET THE ENERGIES FLOW THROUGH YOU, AND MAKE YOU STRONG AGAIN
SLEEP YOUR EVER DREAMLESS SLEEP, AND NOVA SHALL WATCH OVER YOU.
SHE HAS WITNESSED THIS DAY THE ANNIHILATION OF A PLANETARY CIVILIZATION OLDER THAN HUMAN HISTORY. YET SHE FEELS NOTHING BUT HER GROWING LOVE FOR THE DEMI-GOD.
HER LIFE ON EARTH, IT SEEMS, IS FINALLY FORGOTTEN.

NOW, LET US LOOK ELSEWHERE FOR A SHORT WHILE...
THE TIME IS SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, IN NEW YORK THE MEMBERS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE RECOUPERATING FROM AN ALL-OUT BATTLE WITH THE SHAPE-SHIFTING SKRULLS AND AN ALIEN SUPER-SOLDIER KNOWN AS GLADIATOR.
BUT THIS IS NOT NEW YORK, AND THIS SOMBER, BROODING FIGURE IS NOT ONE OF THE FF. HE IS, IN FACT, THEIR GREATEST ENEMY, A MAN OF VAST KNOWLEDGE AND AWESOME POWER.
HE IS DOCTOR DOOM!
OOO
IT IS GOOD.

MY BELOVED *LATVERIA* SUFFERED MUCH UNDER THE RULE OF THE USURPER *SORBA*. HE BROUGHT CRUEL LAWS AND GREAT PAIN TO THESE, MY LOYAL SUBJECTS

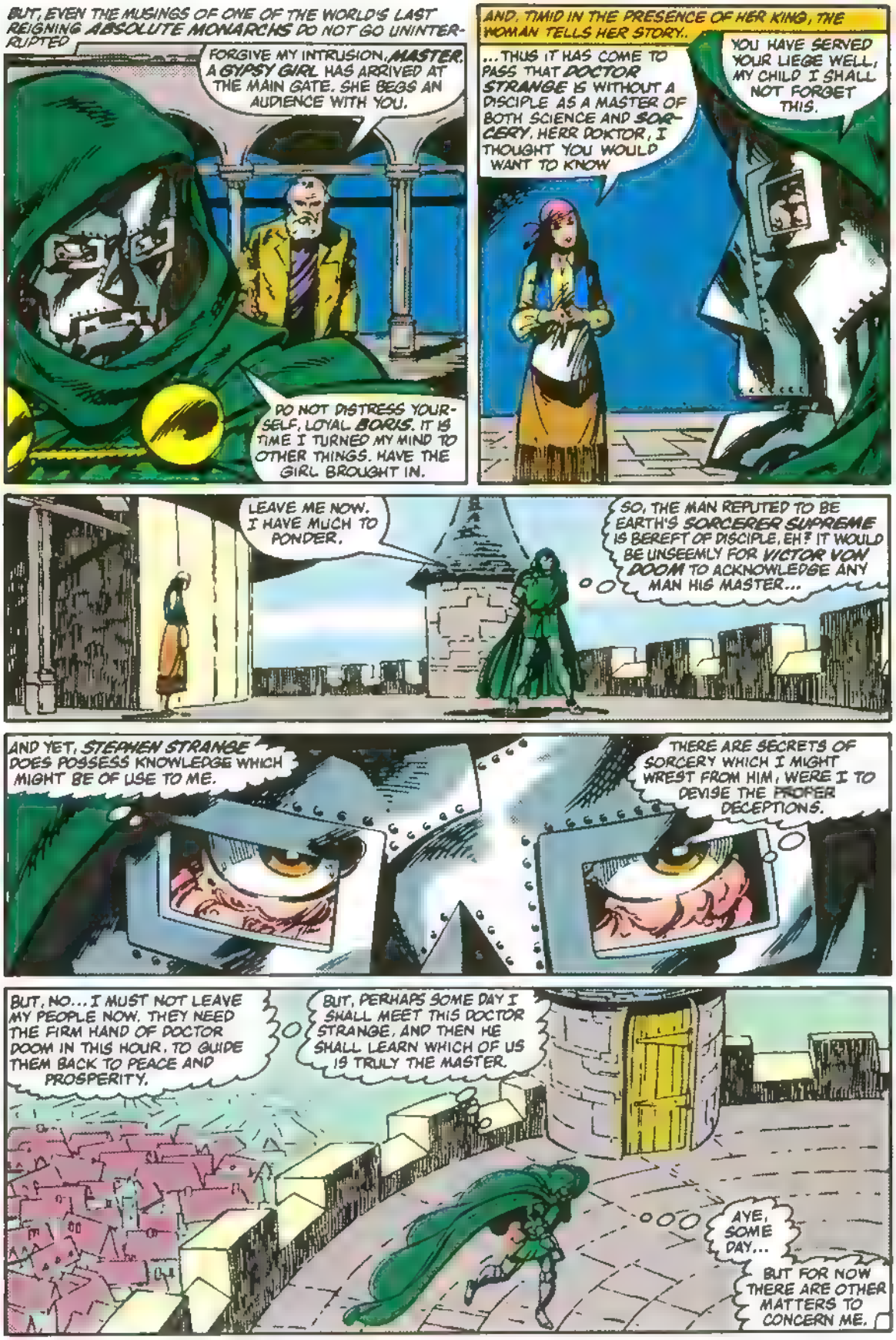
IT WAS AS IF A HUGE AND TERRIBLE *PLAGUE* HAD FALLEN UPON THIS LITTLE COUNTRY, TOPPLING IT FROM ITS PLACE AS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL NATIONS ON *EARTH*...

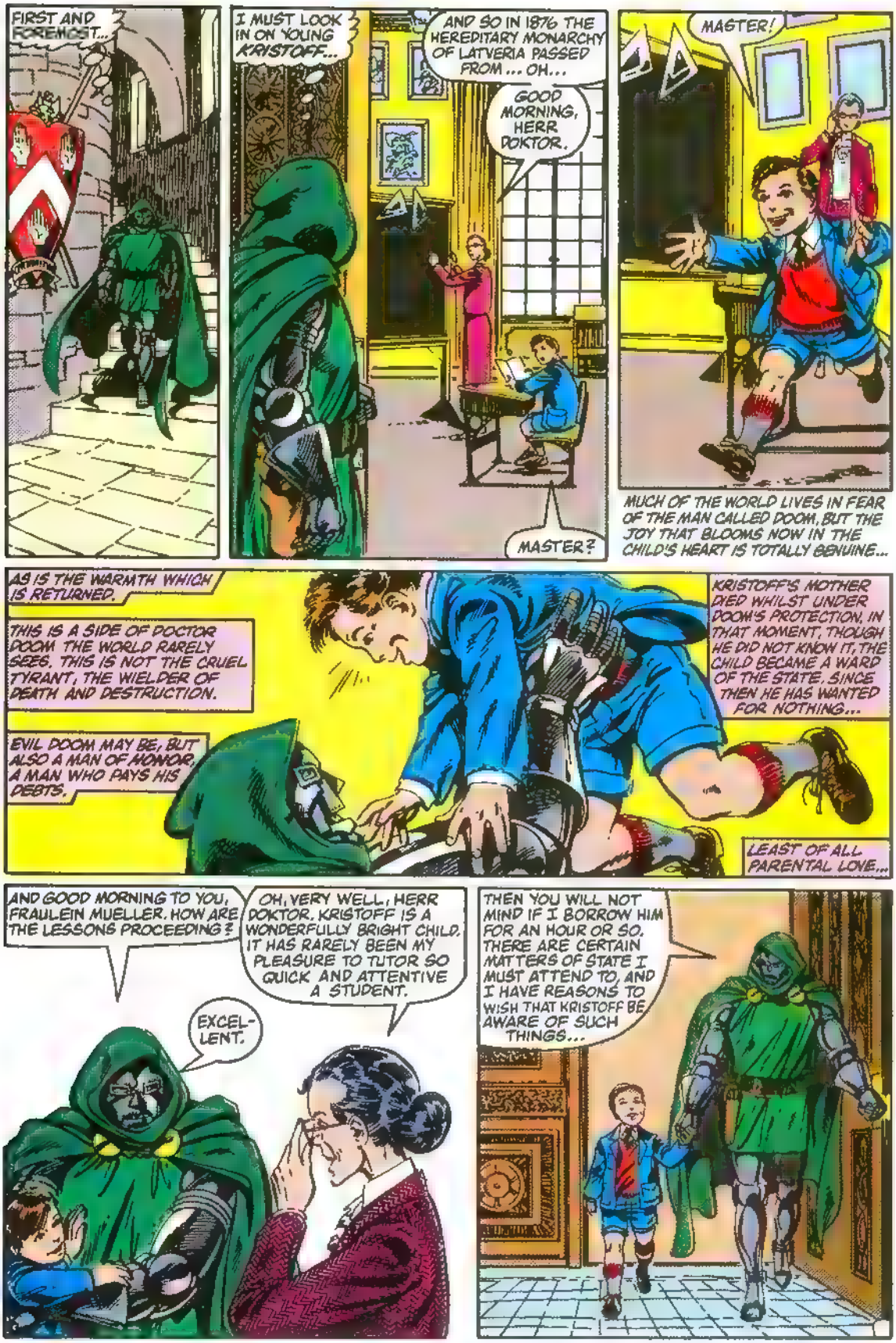
TO A PITIFUL *JOKE* OF A COUNTRY, TOTTERING ON THE BRINK OF *ANNIHILATION*.

BUT NOW THE RULE OF *DOOM* IS RESTORED THE PEOPLE PROSPER ONCE AGAIN. THE FIELDS ARE LUSH WITH GRAIN, THE SHOPS BULGE WITH LUXURIES.

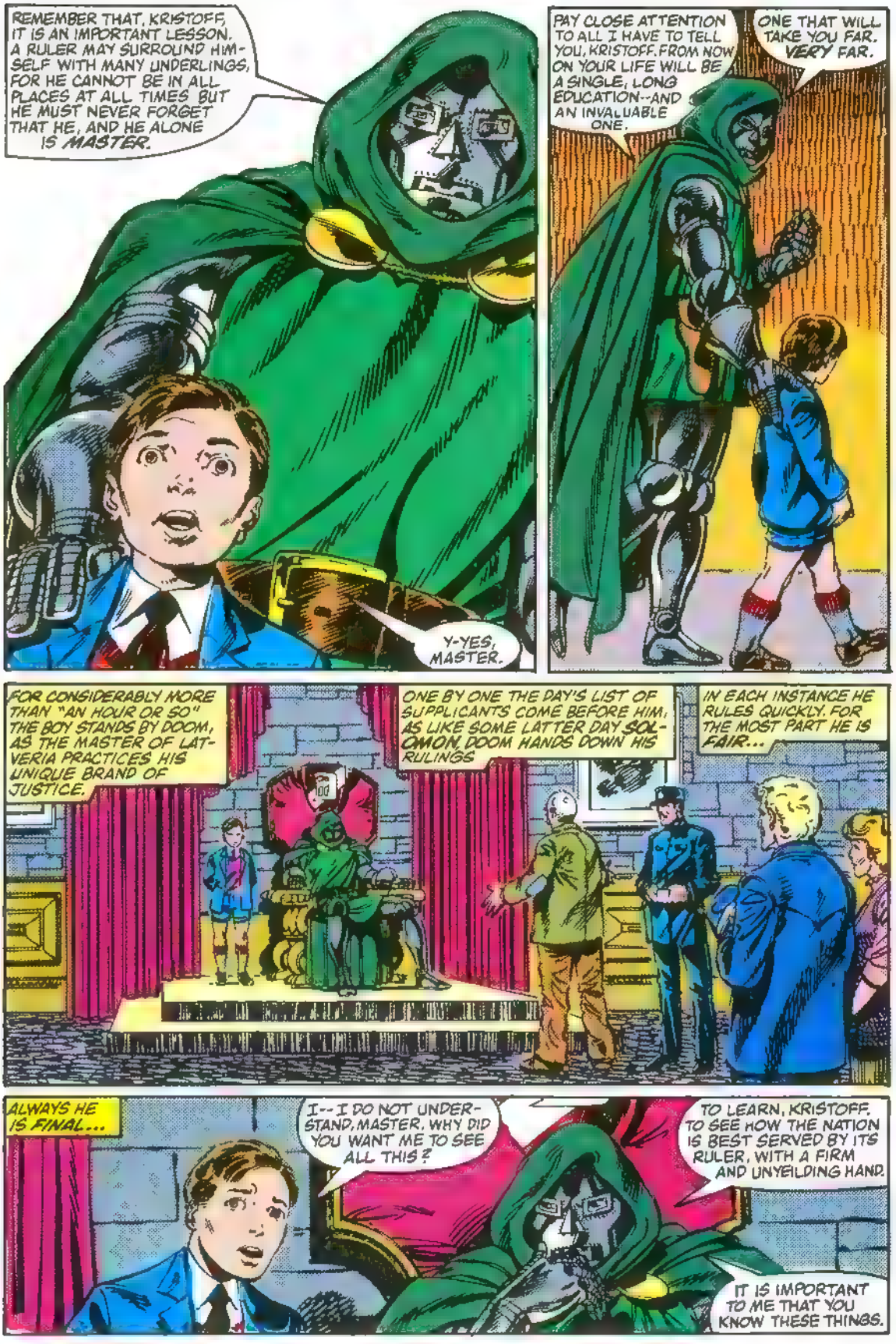
ONCE MORE THERE IS NO CRIME, NO HUNGER, NO UNEMPLOYMENT IN ALL THE LAND. THE PROCESS OF REBUILDING *DOOMSTADT* GOES QUICKLY THE PEOPLE ARE HAPPY AND CONTENT

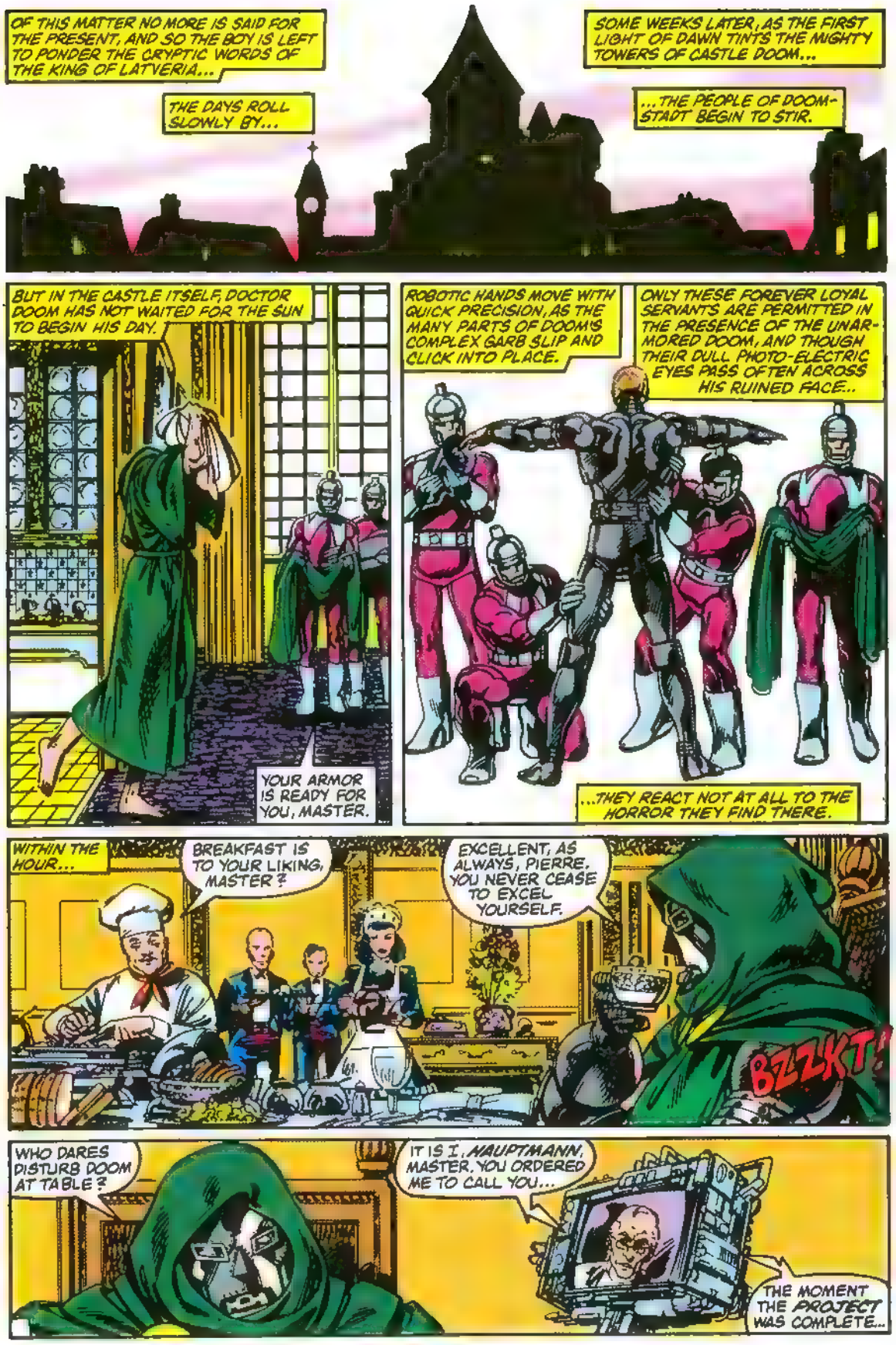
AS I HAVE *COMMANDED* THEY BE...


BUT, EVEN THE MUSINGS OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S LAST REIGNING ABSOLUTE MONARCHS DO NOT GO UNINTERRUPTED
FORGIVE MY INTRUSION, MASTER. A GYPSY GIRL HAS ARRIVED AT THE MAIN GATE. SHE BEGS AN AUDIENCE WITH YOU.
DO NOT DISTRESS YOURSELF, LOYAL BORIS. IT IS TIME I TURNED MY MIND TO OTHER THINGS. HAVE THE GIRL BROUGHT IN.
AND, TIMID IN THE PRESENCE OF HER KING, THE WOMAN TELLS HER STORY..
...THUS IT HAS COME TO PASS THAT DOCTOR STRANGE IS WITHOUT A DISCIPLE AS A MASTER OF BOTH SCIENCE AND SORCERY. HERR DOKTOR, I THOUGHT YOU WOULD WANT TO KNOW
YOU HAVE SERVED YOUR LIEGE WELL, MY CHILD I SHALL NOT FORGET THIS.
LEAVE ME NOW. I HAVE MUCH TO PONDER.
SO, THE MAN REPUTED TO BE EARTH'S SORCERER SUPREME IS BEREFT OF DISCIPLE, EH? IT WOULD BE UNSEEMLY FOR VICTOR VON DOOM TO ACKNOWLEDGE ANY MAN HIS MASTER...
AND YET, STEPHEN STRANGE DOES POSSESS KNOWLEDGE WHICH MIGHT BE OF USE TO ME.
THERE ARE SECRETS OF SORCERY WHICH I MIGHT WREST FROM HIM, WERE I TO DEVISE THE PROPER DECEPTIONS.
BUT, NO... I MUST NOT LEAVE MY PEOPLE NOW. THEY NEED THE FIRM HAND OF DOCTOR DOOM IN THIS HOUR, TO GUIDE THEM BACK TO PEACE AND PROSPERITY.
BUT, PERHAPS SOME DAY I SHALL MEET THIS DOCTOR STRANGE, AND THEN HE SHALL LEARN WHICH OF US IS TRULY THE MASTER.
AYE, SOME DAY...
BUT FOR NOW THERE ARE OTHER MATTERS TO CONCERN ME.

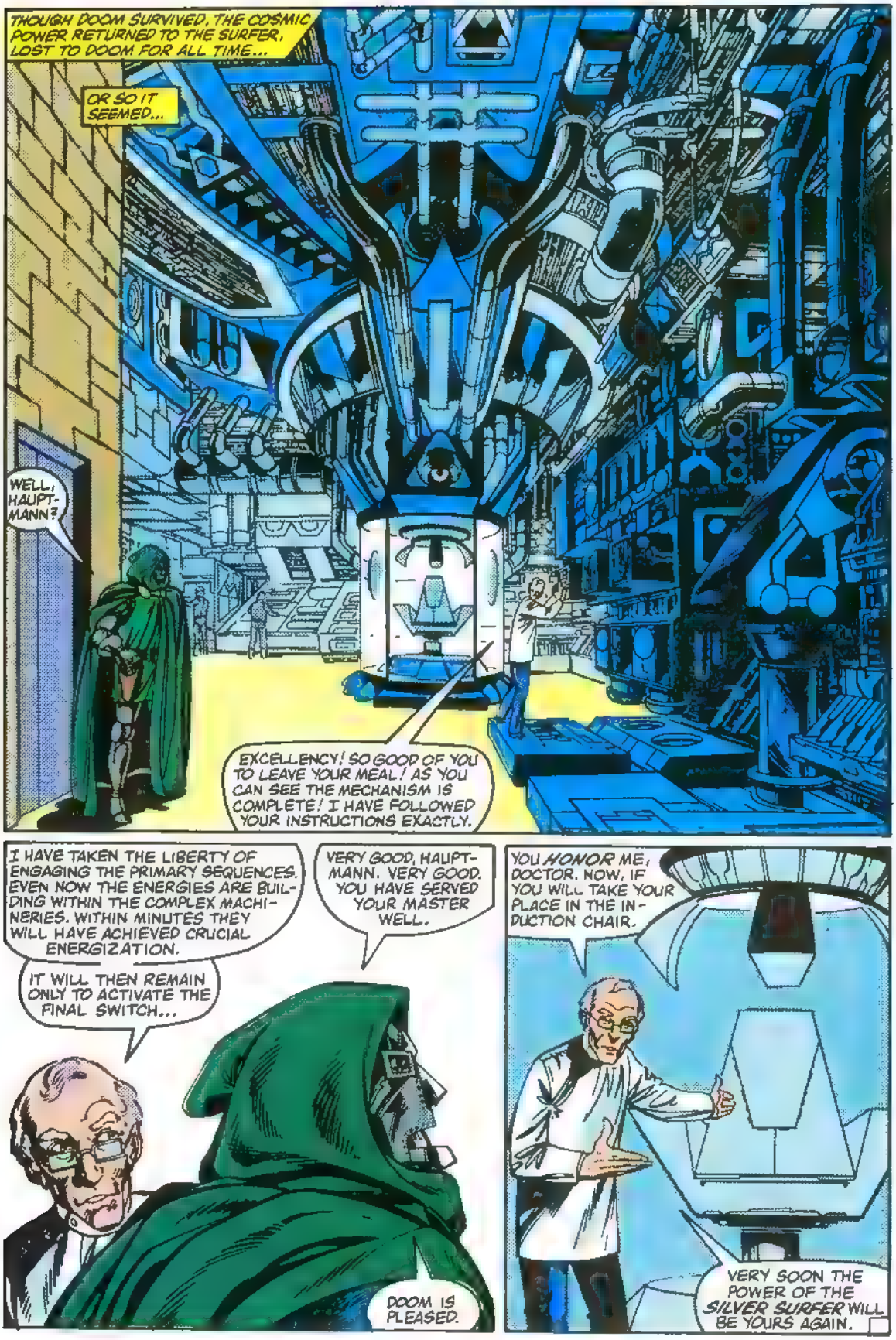

FIRST AND FOREMOST...
I MUST LOOK IN ON YOUNG KRISTOFF...
AND SO IN 1876 THE HEREDITARY MONARCHY OF LATVERIA PASSED FROM... OH...
GOOD MORNING, HERR DOKTOR.
MASTER?
MASTER!
MUCH OF THE WORLD LIVES IN FEAR OF THE MAN CALLED DOOM, BUT THE JOY THAT BLOOMS NOW IN THE CHILD'S HEART IS TOTALLY GENUINE...
AS IS THE WARMTH WHICH IS RETURNED.
THIS IS A SIDE OF DOCTOR DOOM THE WORLD RARELY SEES. THIS IS NOT THE CRUEL TYRANT, THE WIELDER OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION.
EVIL DOOM MAY BE, BUT ALSO A MAN OF HONOR, A MAN WHO PAYS HIS DEBTS.
KRISTOFF'S MOTHER DIED WHILST UNDER DOOM'S PROTECTION. IN THAT MOMENT, THOUGH HE DID NOT KNOW IT, THE CHILD BECAME A WARD OF THE STATE. SINCE THEN HE HAS WANTED FOR NOTHING...
LEAST OF ALL PARENTAL LOVE...
AND GOOD MORNING TO YOU, FRAULEIN MUELLER. HOW ARE THE LESSONS PROCEEDING?
OH, VERY WELL, HERR DOKTOR. KRISTOFF IS A WONDERFULLY BRIGHT CHILD. IT HAS RARELY BEEN MY PLEASURE TO TUTOR SO QUICK AND ATTENTIVE A STUDENT.
EXCEL-LENT.
THEN YOU WILL NOT MIND IF I BORROW HIM FOR AN HOUR OR SO. THERE ARE CERTAIN MATTERS OF STATE I MUST ATTEND TO, AND I HAVE REASONS TO WISH THAT KRISTOFF BE AWARE OF SUCH THINGS...

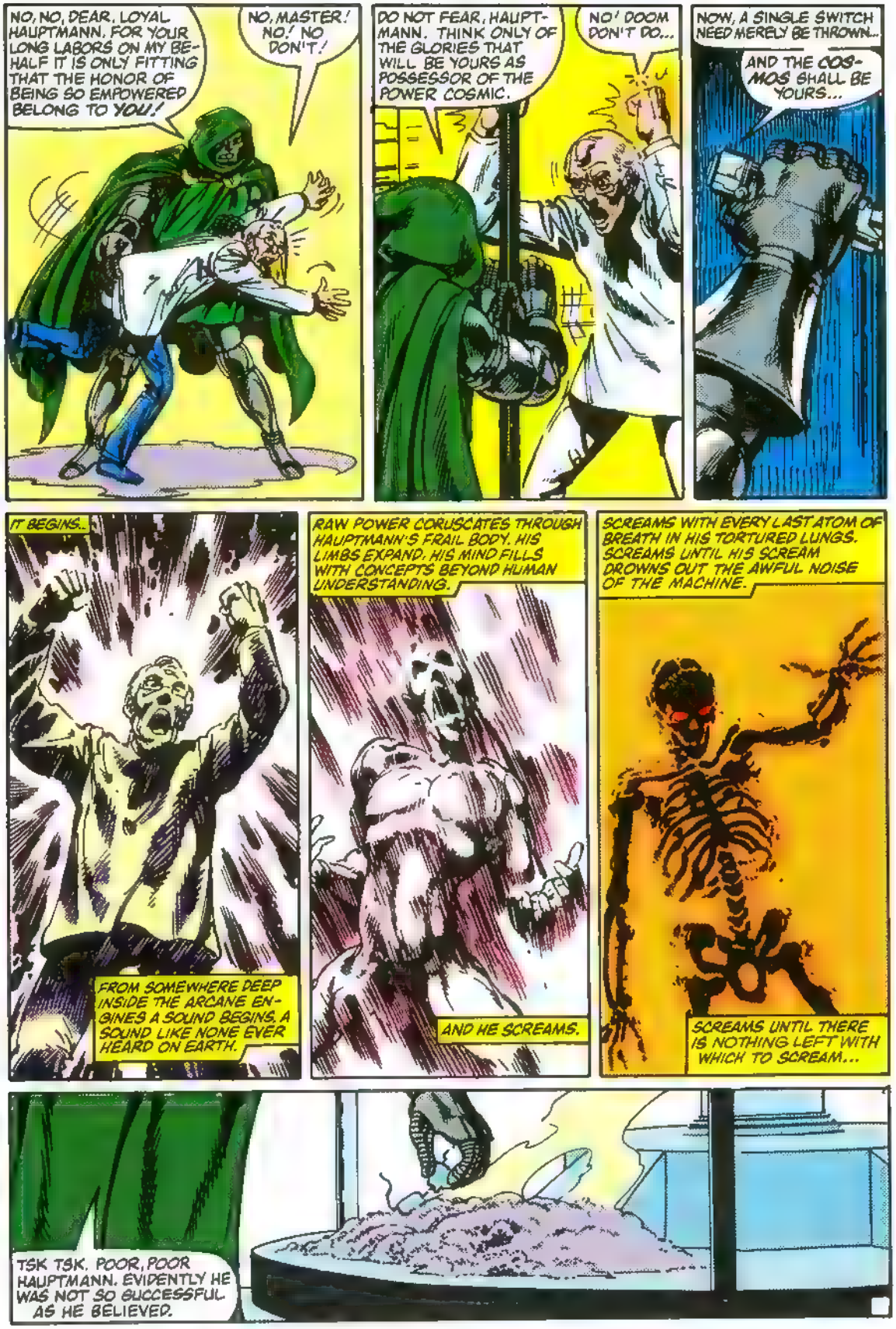
FIRST, KRISTOFF, SINCE MY RETURN TO POWER I HAVE NOT HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW THE ROBOTS I EMPLOY FOR SOME OF MY MORE MENIAL OPERATIONS.
THIS SEEMS AS GOOD A TIME AS ANY TO DO JUST THAT.
YES, MASTER.
SILENTLY, THE STEEL-CLAD MONARCH PACES BEFORE HIS DUPLICATES, UNTIL...
ROBOT A 76, YOU HAVE A SCRATCH ON THE SHOULDER OF YOUR ARMOR. YOU ARE NOT A COMBAT UNIT HOW DID YOU COME TO BE DAMAGED?
THE HUMAN ARCADE STRUCK A MATCH THERE DURING OUR RECENT CONFRONTATION WITH THE MUTANT X-MEN, SIRE.
I SEE. AND IN WHAT MANNER DID YOU TERMINATE ARCADE FOR THIS AFFRONT TO THE PERSONNAGE OF DOOM?
I DID NOT TERMINATE HIM, MASTER. I JUDGED IT CONCEIVABLE YOU MIGHT HAVE NEED OF HIM LATER.
NEED?
DOOM NEEDS NO ONE.

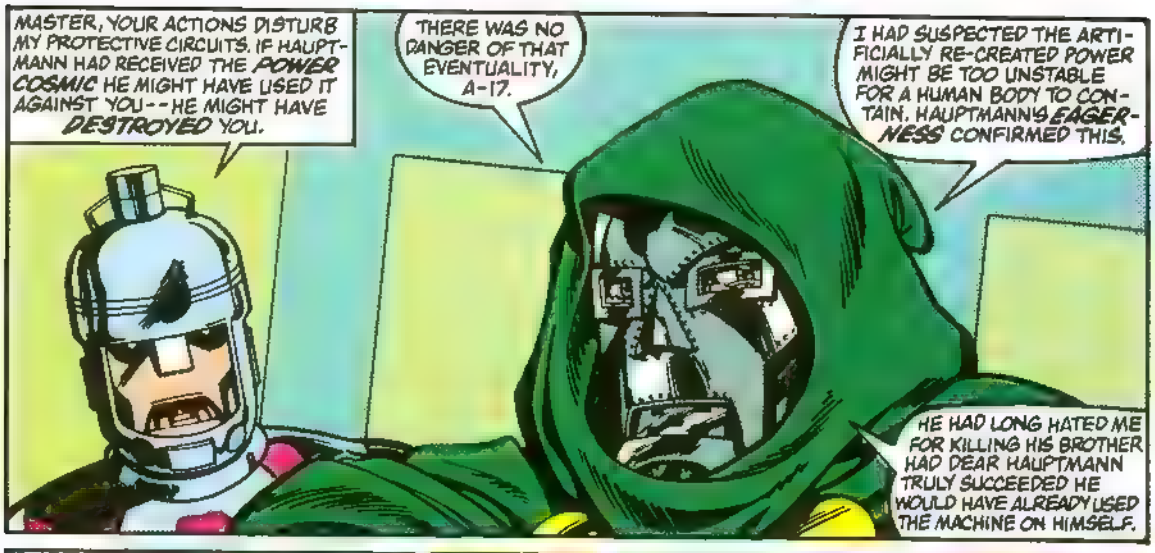

REMEMBER THAT, KRISTOFF, IT IS AN IMPORTANT LESSON. A RULER MAY SURROUND HIMSELF WITH MANY UNDERLINGS, FOR HE CANNOT BE IN ALL PLACES AT ALL TIMES BUT HE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT HE, AND HE ALONE IS MASTER.
Y-YES, MASTER.
PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO ALL I HAVE TO TELL YOU, KRISTOFF. FROM NOW ON YOUR LIFE WILL BE A SINGLE, LONG EDUCATION--AND AN INVALUABLE ONE.
ONE THAT WILL TAKE YOU FAR. VERY FAR.
FOR CONSIDERABLY MORE THAN "AN HOUR OR SO" THE BOY STANDS BY DOOM, AS THE MASTER OF LATVERIA PRACTICES HIS UNIQUE BRAND OF JUSTICE.
ONE BY ONE THE DAY'S LIST OF SUPPLICANTS COME BEFORE HIM; AS LIKE SOME LATTER DAY SOLOMON, DOOM HANDS DOWN HIS RULINGS
IN EACH INSTANCE HE RULES QUICKLY. FOR THE MOST PART HE IS FAIR...
ALWAYS HE IS FINAL...
I--I DO NOT UNDERSTAND, MASTER. WHY DID YOU WANT ME TO SEE ALL THIS?
TO LEARN, KRISTOFF. TO SEE HOW THE NATION IS BEST SERVED BY ITS RULER, WITH A FIRM AND UNYIELDING HAND.
IT IS IMPORTANT TO ME THAT YOU KNOW THESE THINGS.

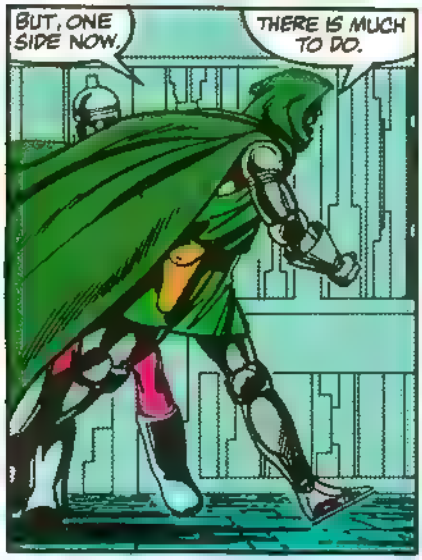

OF THIS MATTER NO MORE IS SAID FOR THE PRESENT, AND SO THE BOY IS LEFT TO PONDER THE CRYPTIC WORDS OF THE KING OF LATVERIA...
THE DAYS ROLL SLOWLY BY...
SOME WEEKS LATER, AS THE FIRST LIGHT OF DAWN TINTS THE MIGHTY TOWERS OF CASTLE DOOM...
...THE PEOPLE OF DOOMSTADT BEGIN TO STIR.
BUT IN THE CASTLE ITSELF, DOCTOR DOOM HAS NOT WAITED FOR THE SUN TO BEGIN HIS DAY.
YOUR ARMOR IS READY FOR YOU, MASTER.
ROBOTIC HANDS MOVE WITH QUICK PRECISION, AS THE MANY PARTS OF DOOM'S COMPLEX GARB SLIP AND CLICK INTO PLACE.
ONLY THESE FOREVER LOYAL SERVANTS ARE PERMITTED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE UNARMORED DOOM, AND THOUGH THEIR DULL PHOTO-ELECTRIC EYES PASS OFTEN ACROSS HIS RUINED FACE...
...THEY REACT NOT AT ALL TO THE HORROR THEY FIND THERE.
WITHIN THE HOUR...
BREAKFAST IS TO YOUR LIKING, MASTER?
EXCELLENT, AS ALWAYS, PIERRE. YOU NEVER CEASE TO EXCEL YOURSELF.
BZZKT!
WHO DARES DISTURB DOOM AT TABLE?
IT IS I, MAUPTMANN, MASTER. YOU ORDERED ME TO CALL YOU...
THE MOMENT THE PROJECT WAS COMPLETE...

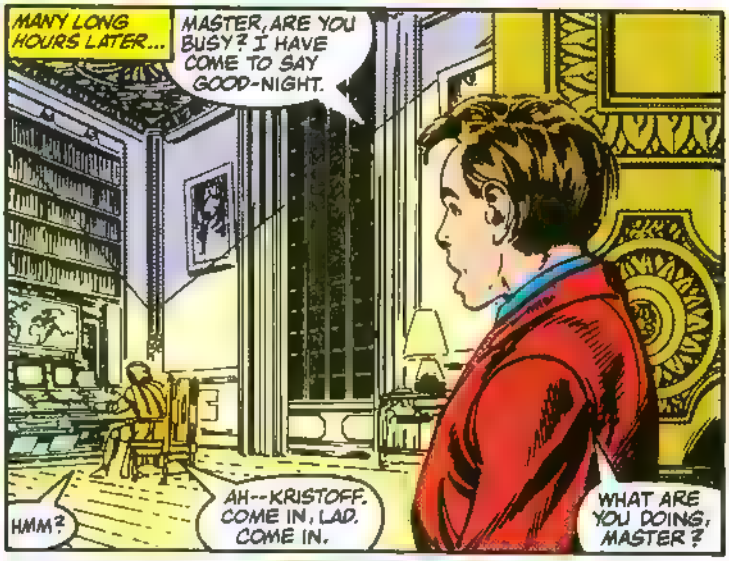
WITHIN SECONDS, IN AN ELEVATOR PLUNGING INTO THE CASTLE'S DEPTHS...
AT LAST! AT LONG LAST!
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN UNDER WAY SO MANY MONTHS I HAD ALMOST DESPAIRED OF EVER SEEING IT REACH FRUITION.
WITH ANTICIPATION PULSING IN HIS VEINS, DOOM'S MIND TURNS BACK, BACK TO THAT DAY WHEN YEARS AGO, HE HAD SUCCEEDED IN LURING INTO HIS CASTLE THE BANISHED HERALD OF GALACTUS, THE SUPREMELY POWERFUL SILVER SURFER.
TRICKING THE SURFER INTO BELIEVING HIM TO BE A BENEVOLENT SCIENTIST. .
.. DOOM WAS ABLE TO USE HIS VAST TECHNOLOGICAL SKILLS TO CATCH THE SKY-RIDER UNAWARES.
AND THE DICTATOR DRAINED FROM HIS ARGENT FORM THE STAR-SPANNING POWER.
THUS ELEVATED ALMOST TO GODHOOD DOOM WENT MAD, AND SET FORTH UPON A CAMPAIGN OF CONQUEST AND DESTRUCTION.
NO ONE, IT SEEMED, COULD STAND AGAINST HIM.
BUT REED RICHARDS, LEADER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR, WAS ABLE TO TRICK DOOM.
CLUTCHING A MECHANISM HE BELIEVED HAD BEEN DESIGNED TO STRIP HIM OF THE POWER COSMIC, DOOM FLEW TO THE VERY THRESHOLD OF SPACE..
THERE TO SMASH AGAINST THE BARRIER GALACTUS HAD SET TO HOLD HIS REBELLIOUS SILVER HERALD FOREVER PRISONER ON EARTH

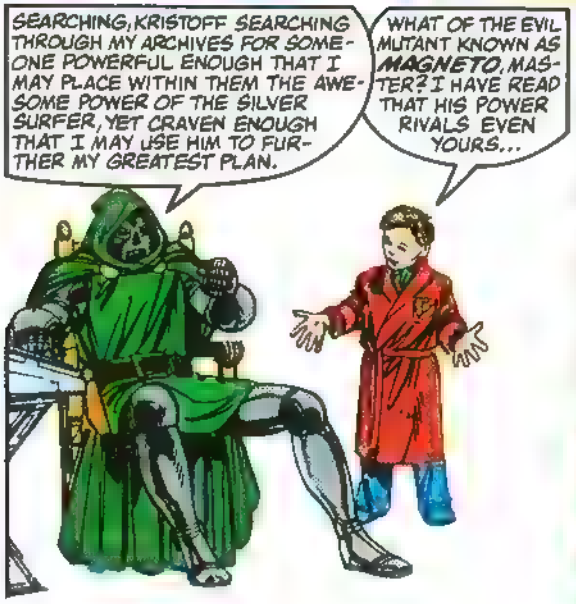

THOUGH DOOM SURVIVED, THE COSMIC POWER RETURNED TO THE SURFER, LOST TO DOOM FOR ALL TIME...
OR SO IT SEEMED...
WELL, HAUPT-MANN?
EXCELLENCY! SO GOOD OF YOU TO LEAVE YOUR MEAL! AS YOU CAN SEE THE MECHANISM IS COMPLETE! I HAVE FOLLOWED YOUR INSTRUCTIONS EXACTLY.
I HAVE TAKEN THE LIBERTY OF ENGAGING THE PRIMARY SEQUENCES. EVEN NOW THE ENERGIES ARE BUILDING WITHIN THE COMPLEX MACHINERIES. WITHIN MINUTES THEY WILL HAVE ACHIEVED CRUCIAL ENERGIZATION.
VERY GOOD, HAUPT-MANN. VERY GOOD. YOU HAVE SERVED YOUR MASTER WELL.
IT WILL THEN REMAIN ONLY TO ACTIVATE THE FINAL SWITCH...
DOOM IS PLEASED.
YOU HONOR ME, DOCTOR. NOW, IF YOU WILL TAKE YOUR PLACE IN THE INDUCTION CHAIR.
VERY SOON THE POWER OF THE SILVER SURFER WILL BE YOURS AGAIN.


NO, NO, DEAR, LOYAL HAUPTMANN. FOR YOUR LONG LABORS ON MY BEHALF IT IS ONLY FITTING THAT THE HONOR OF BEING SO EMPOWERED BELONG TO YOU!
NO, MASTER! NO! NO DON'T!
DO NOT FEAR, HAUPTMANN. THINK ONLY OF THE GLORIES THAT WILL BE YOURS AS POSSESSOR OF THE POWER COSMIC.
NO! DOOM DON'T DO...
NOW, A SINGLE SWITCH NEED MERELY BE THROWN...
AND THE COSMOS SHALL BE YOURS...
IT BEGINS..
FROM SOMEWHERE DEEP INSIDE THE ARCANE ENGINES A SOUND BEGINS, A SOUND LIKE NONE EVER HEARD ON EARTH.
RAW POWER CORUSCATES THROUGH HAUPTMANN'S FRAIL BODY. HIS LIMBS EXPAND. HIS MIND FILLS WITH CONCEPTS BEYOND HUMAN UNDERSTANDING.
AND HE SCREAMS.
SCREAMS WITH EVERY LAST ATOM OF BREATH IN HIS TORTURED LUNGS. SCREAMS UNTIL HIS SCREAM DROWNS OUT THE AWFUL NOISE OF THE MACHINE.
SCREAMS UNTIL THERE IS NOTHING LEFT WITH WHICH TO SCREAM...
TSK TSK. POOR, POOR HAUPTMANN. EVIDENTLY HE WAS NOT SO SUCCESSFUL AS HE BELIEVED.


MASTER, YOUR ACTIONS DISTURB MY PROTECTIVE CIRCUITS. IF HAUPTMANN HAD RECEIVED THE POWER COSMIC HE MIGHT HAVE USED IT AGAINST YOU--HE MIGHT HAVE DESTROYED YOU.
THERE WAS NO DANGER OF THAT EVENTUALITY, A-17.
I HAD SUSPECTED THE ARTIFICIALLY RE-CREATED POWER MIGHT BE TOO UNSTABLE FOR A HUMAN BODY TO CONTAIN. HAUPTMANN'S EAGERNESS CONFIRMED THIS.
HE HAD LONG HATED ME FOR KILLING HIS BROTHER HAD DEAR HAUPTMANN TRULY SUCCEEDED HE WOULD HAVE ALREADY USED THE MACHINE ON HIMSELF.


BUT, ONE SIDE NOW.
THERE IS MUCH TO DO.

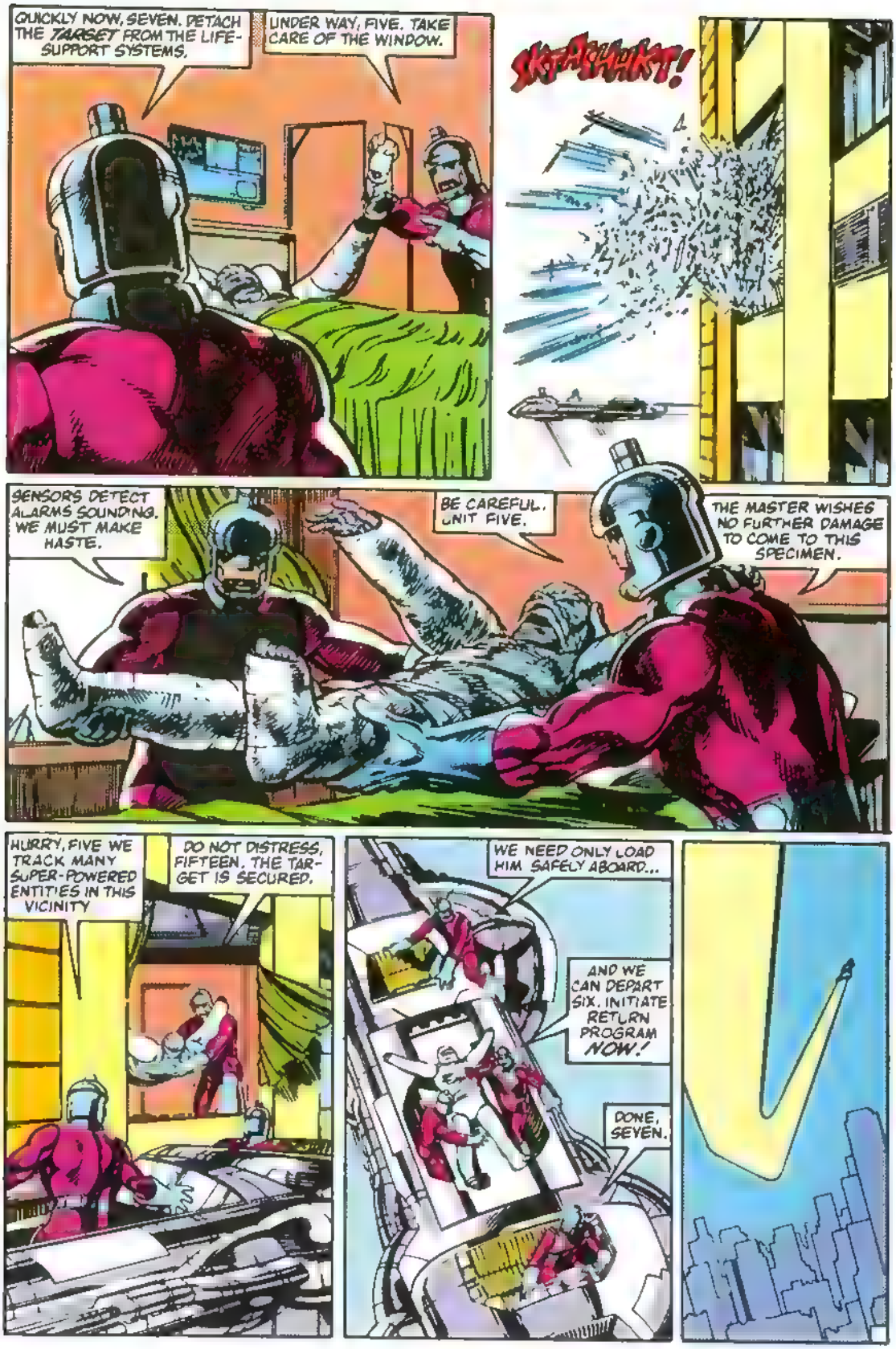

MANY LONG HOURS LATER...
MASTER, ARE YOU BUSY? I HAVE COME TO SAY GOOD-NIGHT.
HMM?
AH--KRISTOFF. COME IN, LAD. COME IN.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING, MASTER?


SEARCHING, KRISTOFF SEARCHING THROUGH MY ARCHIVES FOR SOMEONE POWERFUL ENOUGH THAT I MAY PLACE WITHIN THEM THE AWESOME POWER OF THE SILVER SURFER, YET CRAVEN ENOUGH THAT I MAY USE HIM TO FURTHER MY GREATEST PLAN.
WHAT OF THE EVIL MUTANT KNOWN AS MAGNETO, MASTER? I HAVE READ THAT HIS POWER RIVALS EVEN YOURS...

... RIVALS...

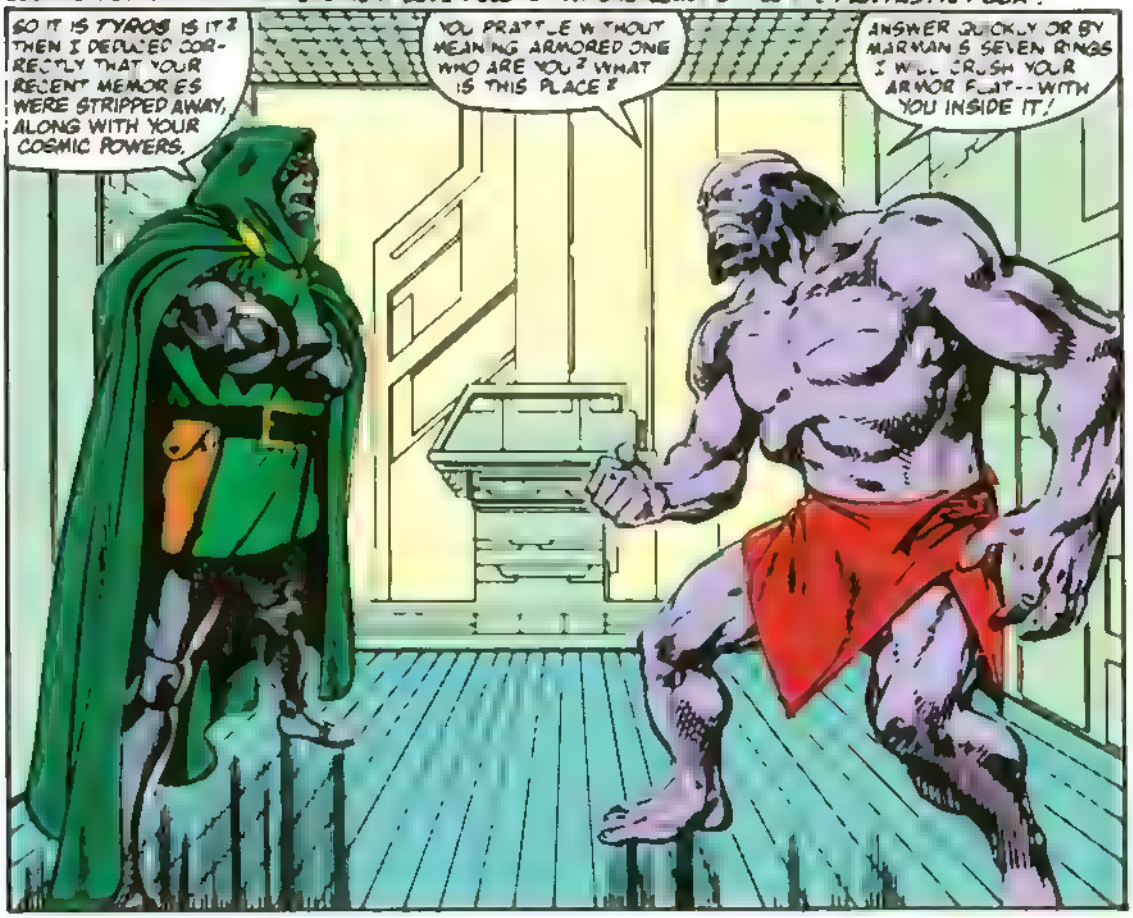
NO ONE RIVALS DOOM!
NO ONE!
DOOM IS SUPREME! THERE IS NO POWER ON EARTH, NO INTELLECT IN ALL CREATION TO EQUAL MINE!
MASTER... YOU'RE HURTING ME!
BE GONE FROM MY SIGHT! YOU HAVE ANGERED ME BEYOND MEASURE. GO TO YOUR QUARTERS AND REMAIN UNTIL I SUMMON YOU AGAIN!
Y-YES, MASTER!
STUPID, INSOLENT CHILD! TO EVEN SUGGEST THAT A FREAK SUCH AS MAGNETO COULD BE A RIVAL TO DOOM--MAGNETO, WHO HAS LATELY PERMITTED FOOLISH HUMAN WEAKNESS TO DILUTE HIS OWN SCHEMES OF CONQUEST.
NO, THE ERSTWHILE MASTER OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS IS OF NO USE TO DOOM...
BUT THERE MUST BE SOMEONE--AND THIS WRETCHED COMPUTER WILL GIVE ME A NAME OR I WILL SMASH ITS USELESS CIRCUITS TO...
WAIT... A NAME APPEARS. A NAME I SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF FOR MYSELF!
IF TRULY HE STILL LIVES, HE WILL BE PERFECT FOR MY PLAN, MY GOAL...
THE ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

A FEW DAYS LATER, IN NEW YORK...
MORNIN', BOB. HOW'S OUR JOHN DOE TODAY?
UNCHANGED, JIM. I SWEAR, THAT GUY ALMOST MAKES ME BELIEVE IN MIRACLES. THEY FIND HIM STARK NAKED IN A GARBAGE PILE EVERY MAJOR BONE IN HIS BODY BROKEN. .
STILL GOT HIM ON THE GLUCOSE MARTINIS?
YEP. THAT SUGAR AND ALCOHOL SOLUTION SEEMS TO BE HOLDING HIS CONDITION BUT IT'S HARD TO TELL IF HE'S HEALING OR NOT NONE OF HIS CHEMISTRIES COME OUT ANYTHING LIKE THE WAY THEY SHOULD BE. IF ONLY HE COULD SPEAK ENGLISH--OR ANY LANGUAGE WE KNOW.
IT SOUNDS CRAZY, BUT I'M HALFWAY CONVINCED HE'S NOT EVEN HUMAN...
QUICKLY UNIT FIVE--THIS IS THE CORRECT CHAMBER. DISPOSE OF THE BODIES AND LET US PROCEED WITH AVASE THREE.
THERE'S A STORAGE COMPARTMENT BEHIND YOU I WILL SECRETE THEM THERE MAKE CONTACT WITH OUR TARGET
"THE ROOM IS AS PLEASANT AS A SICKROOM CAN BE. BUT THE ROBOT'S SENSORS TELL HIM ALL IS NOT RIGHT HERE...
...AND THE FIGURE ON THE BED GLARES AT THE INTRUDER WITH TERRIBLE HATRED...

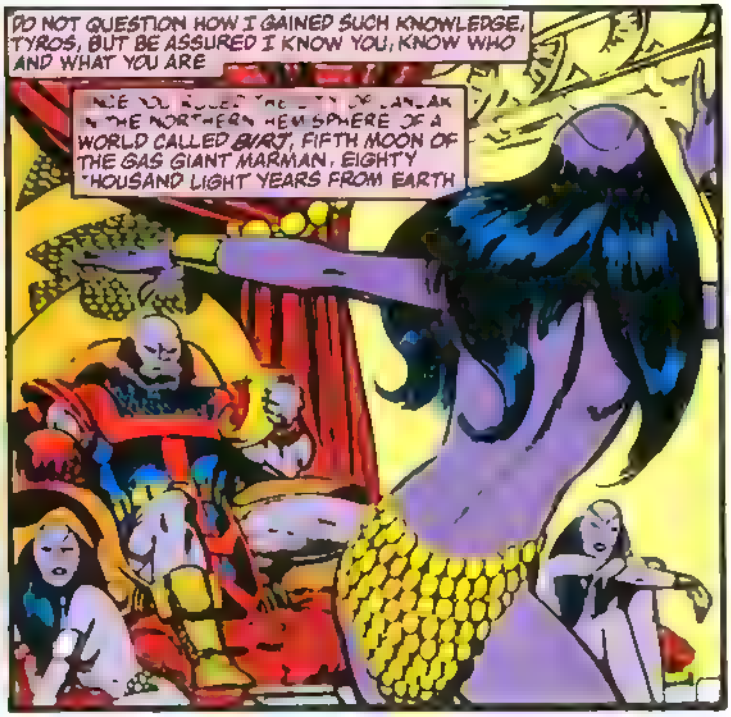

QUICKLY NOW, SEVEN. DETACH THE TARGET FROM THE LIFE-SUPPORT SYSTEMS.
UNDER WAY, FIVE. TAKE CARE OF THE WINDOW.
SKRAKCHUKT!
SENSORS DETECT ALARMS SOUNDING. WE MUST MAKE HASTE.
BE CAREFUL, UNIT FIVE.
THE MASTER WISHES NO FURTHER DAMAGE TO COME TO THIS SPECIMEN.
HURRY, FIVE WE TRACK MANY SUPER-POWERED ENTITIES IN THIS VICINITY
DO NOT DISTRESS, FIFTEEN. THE TARGET IS SECURED.
WE NEED ONLY LOAD HIM SAFELY ABOARD...
AND WE CAN DEPART SIX. INITIATE RETURN PROGRAM NOW!
DONE, SEVEN.

WITHIN FOUR HOURS THE SLEEK CRAFT IS FLASHING ACROSS THE TREETOPS OF LATVERIA, BOUND FOR HOME...
AND, EXACTLY SIX WEEKS LATER...
WELL, PHYSICIAN? HOW FARES YOUR PATIENT?
AH, MASTER, I WAS JUST ABOUT TO CALL YOU. I BELIEVE HE IS READY.
YOU ARE CERTAIN? I AM PREPARED TO WAIT A FEW MORE DAYS IF NECESSARY.
NO NEED, MASTER. HIS BODY HAS COMPLETELY HEALED. THE TREATMENT YOU PRESCRIBED WORKED PERFECTLY. MY ONLY CONCERN WAS THAT HIS ALIEN METABOLISM MIGHT REJECT THE TRANSLATOR IMPLANT, BUT THAT HAS NOT OCCURRED.
EXCELLENT! IT WOULD SEEM THEN TIME THAT I INTRODUCED MYSELF TO OUR... GUEST.
...ER... FORGIVE ME, MASTER, BUT YOUR GARB IS NOT STERILE...
NO MATTER, PHYSICIAN.
AFTER TODAY HE WILL NOT NEED TO BE PROTECTED BY HIS ENVIRONMENTAL CUBE.
AFTER TODAY HE WILL BE MINE TO COMMAND!
WHO DARES! WHO DARES DISTURB TYROS THE TERRIBLE?!

PAUSE A MOMENT NOW, STUDY CAREFULLY THE TABLEAU UNFOLDING HERE BEFORE YOU. ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL HUMANS OF ALL EARTH'S TORTURED HISTORY FACES AN ALIEN BEING ONCE ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL IN THE COSMOS. HOW CAN WHAT HAPPENS NEXT BODE WELL FOR ANYONE, LEAST OF ALL THE FANTASTIC FOUR?


SO IT IS TYROS, IS IT? THEN I DEDUCE CORRECTLY THAT YOUR RECENT MEMORIES WERE STRIPPED AWAY, ALONG WITH YOUR COSMIC POWERS.
YOU PRATTLE WITHOUT MEANING, ARMORED ONE. WHO ARE YOU? WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
ANSWER QUICKLY OR BY MARMAN'S SEVEN RINGS I WILL CRUSH YOUR ARMOR FLAT--WITH YOU INSIDE IT!

YOUR RAGE IS MAGNIFICENT, TYROS, AND JUSTLY SO. BUT DIRECT IT NOT AGAINST THE PERSON OF DOOM FOR YOUR LIFE NOW RESTS IN THE HOLLOW OF MY HAND.
I AM MASTER HERE, TYROS, AND BEFORE YOU PROTEST THAT IRREVOCABLE FACT YOU WOULD DO WELL TO LISTEN. LISTEN...
AND LEARN

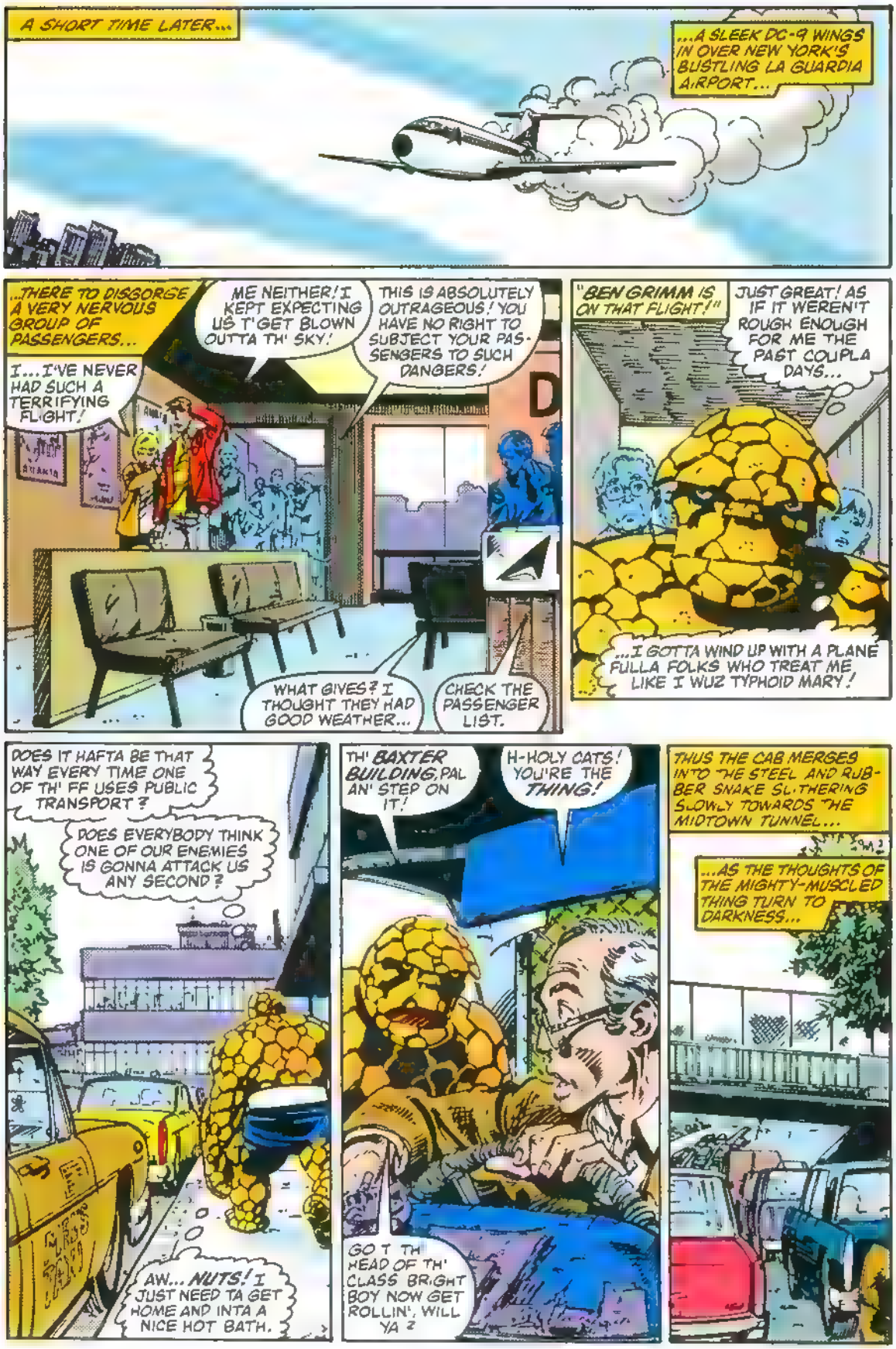

DO NOT QUESTION HOW I GAINED SUCH KNOWLEDGE, TYROS, BUT BE ASSURED I KNOW YOU, KNOW WHO AND WHAT YOU ARE
[illegible] IN THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE OF A WORLD CALLED BYRT, FIFTH MOON OF THE GAS GIANT MARMAN, EIGHTY THOUSAND LIGHT YEARS FROM EARTH

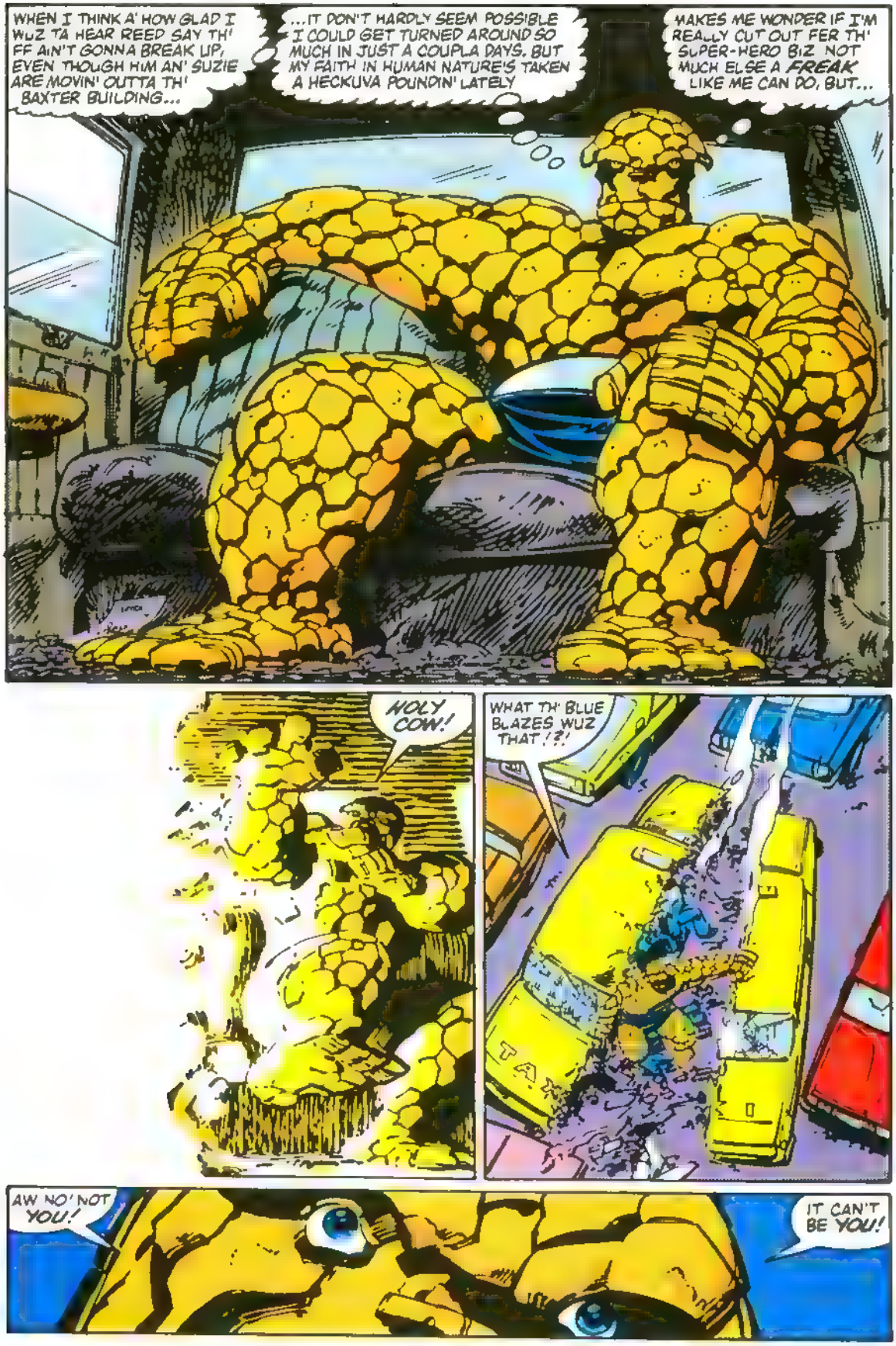
"YOU WERE CONTENT WITH YOUR PETTY TYRANNY, BUT YOU FELL UNDER THE GAZE OF GALACTUS.
"GALACTUS! HE WHO IS POWER PERSONIFIED, THE ONE BEING IN ALL THE UNIVERSE BEFORE WHOM EVEN DOOM MUST TREMBLE. GALACTUS, DEVOURER OF WORLDS, WHO FEEDS ON THE LIFE-ENERGIES OF ENTIRE PLANETS!
"HE HAD NEED OF A NEW HERALD, A NEW SLAVE TO SEARCH THE COSMOS FOR SUITABLE FOOD-WORLDS.
AND, TYROS OF LANLAK, HE HAD CHOSEN YOU!
"AT THE WILL AND HAND OF GALACTUS WERE YOU EMPOWERED AND TRANSFORMED. NO LONGER THE LOWLY DICTATOR OF AN UNIMPORTANT CITY-STATE...
"...NOW YOU WERE THE MASTER OF ALL THINGS ROCK AND EARTH.
NOW YOU WERE TERRAX, THE TAMER!
"BUT, LIKE SO MANY BEFORE YOU, YOU TURNED UPON YOUR MASTER, THINKING YOUR OWN PUNY POWER TO BE A MATCH FOR HIS COSMIC ALL!
"ON EARTH HE STRIPPED YOU OF YOUR ENERGIES,
"TRANSFORMING EVEN AS YOU FELL, YOU PLUNGED FROM THE TOP OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTER...
"PLUNGED APPARENTLY TO A CERTAIN DEATH...
BUT, THOUGH YOU FELL, NOT ALL THE FALL WAS IN YOUR MORTAL FORM. YOU WERE SMASHED ALMOST TO JELLY, BUT YOU SURVIVED. AND IT IS YOUR VERY SURVIVAL THAT TELLS ME YOU ARE SUITABLE FOR A PROJECT I HAVE IN MIND.
YOUR STORY HAS A STRANGE RING OF TRUTH, ONE-CALLED-DOOM. SAY ON.
THE TIME FOR WORDS IS PAST, TYROS. TIME IS NOW RIPE FOR ACTION!

THUS...
I...DO NOT UNDERSTAND THESE MACHINES, NOR THIS STRANGE GARB.
WITHIN THESE MECHANISMS I HAVE CREATED, ARTIFICIALLY, A TINY SPARK, TYROS, A SPARK THAT IS AS NOTHING BEFORE THE FIRE OF GALACTUS.
YET THAT SPARK IS SUFFICIENT TO GENERATE WITHIN YOUR BODY A FORCE TO EQUAL THAT OF THE FIRST HERALD OF GALACTUS, THE SILVER SURFER.
BUT THAT POWER IS UNSTABLE, AND YOU WILL NEED THAT SPECIAL GARMENT TO CHANNEL AND CONTROL THE ENERGIES PROPERLY.
BUT ENOUGH TALK, TYROS, YOU ARE ABOUT TO BE RE-BORN...
FOR THE SECOND TIME!
AGAIN THE SWITCH IS THROWN...
AGAIN THE MYSTERIOUS ENERGIES BURST FROM THE SURROUNDING MACHINES...
AGAIN A MORTAL FORM IS SUBJECTED TO THE BOMBARDMENT BY POWERS ALMOST BEYOND COMPREHENSION...
AND THOUGH IT IS EXTRAORDINARILY PAINFUL...
THIS TIME, AT LEAST, IT IS NOT FATAL...
YAAAAARGH!
TYROS! ROBOTS, SEIZE HIM!

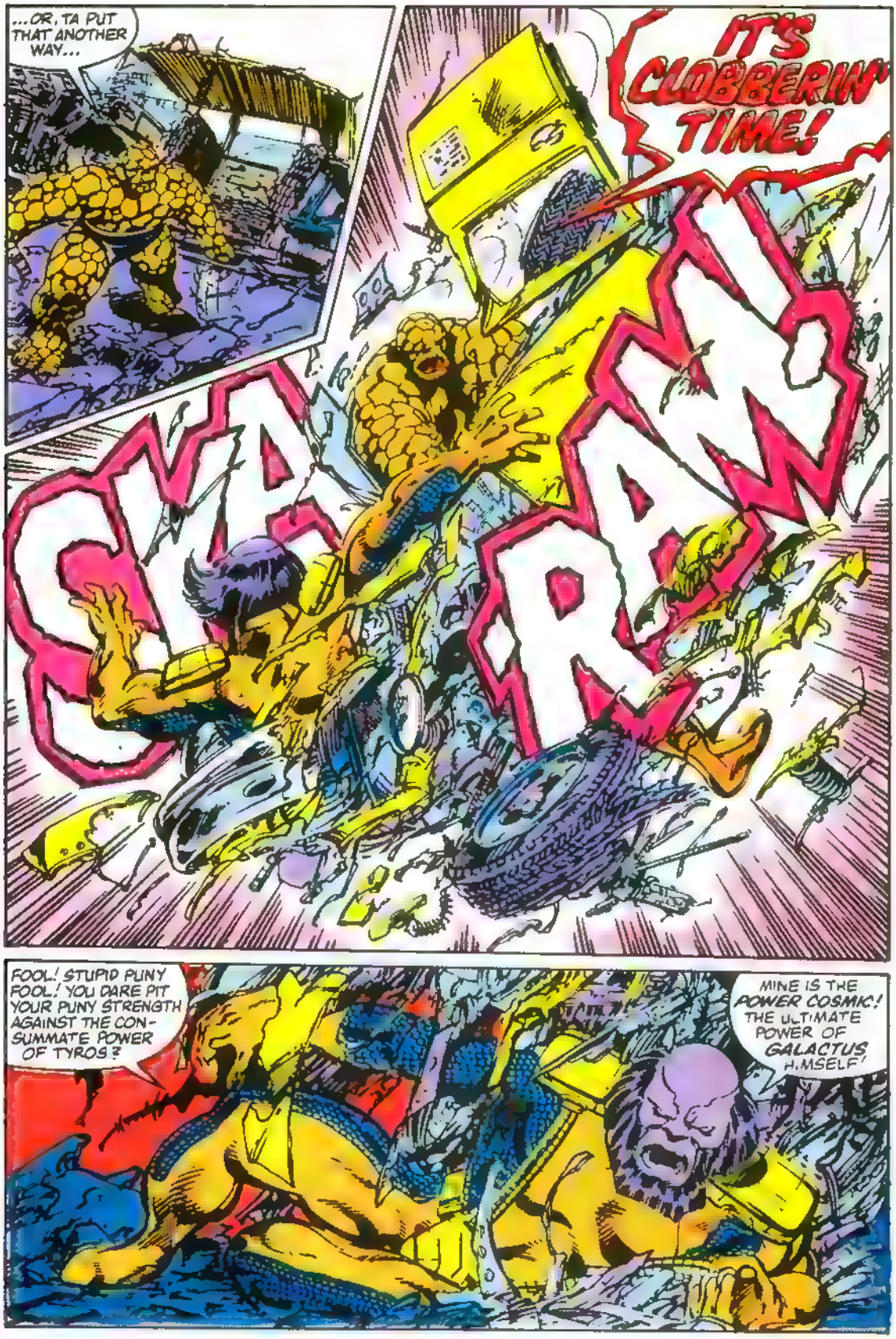
HOLD HIM FAST, MY UNLIVING SLAVES. THE POWER SURGES WITHIN HIM.
IT MAY HAVE DRIVEN HIM INTO MADNESS...
NO... DOOM...
TYROS IS NOT MAD...
TYROS REMEMBERS! REMEMBERS THE COSMIC GLORY, THE BOUNDLESS POWER TO CRUSH AND SHATTER AND SMASH WORLDS.
TYROS REMEMBERS THE UNSPEAKABLE JOYS, THE DARK AND EVIL PLEASURES.
AND MORE, TYROS REMEMBERS WHOSE FAULT IT IS THAT THESE THINGS ARE NOW LOST TO HIM...
THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
GOOD, TYROS. GOOD. KNOW YOU THEN THAT YOUR ENEMIES ARE MINE ALSO-- THAT I HAVE RAISED YOU THUS TO DESTROY THEM FOREVER.
THE POWER TO LEVEL MOUNTAINS AT WILL MAY NO LONGER BE YOURS, BUT I THINK YOU WILL FIND ENOUGH FORCE TO SHATTER THEM...
AND TO SEND YOU ON YOUR MISSION OF VENGEANCE, A SPECIAL SKY-SLED OF MY OWN INVENTION.
IT LOOKS TOO FRAIL, DOOM. IT IS ENOUGH TO SUIT MY PURPOSE?

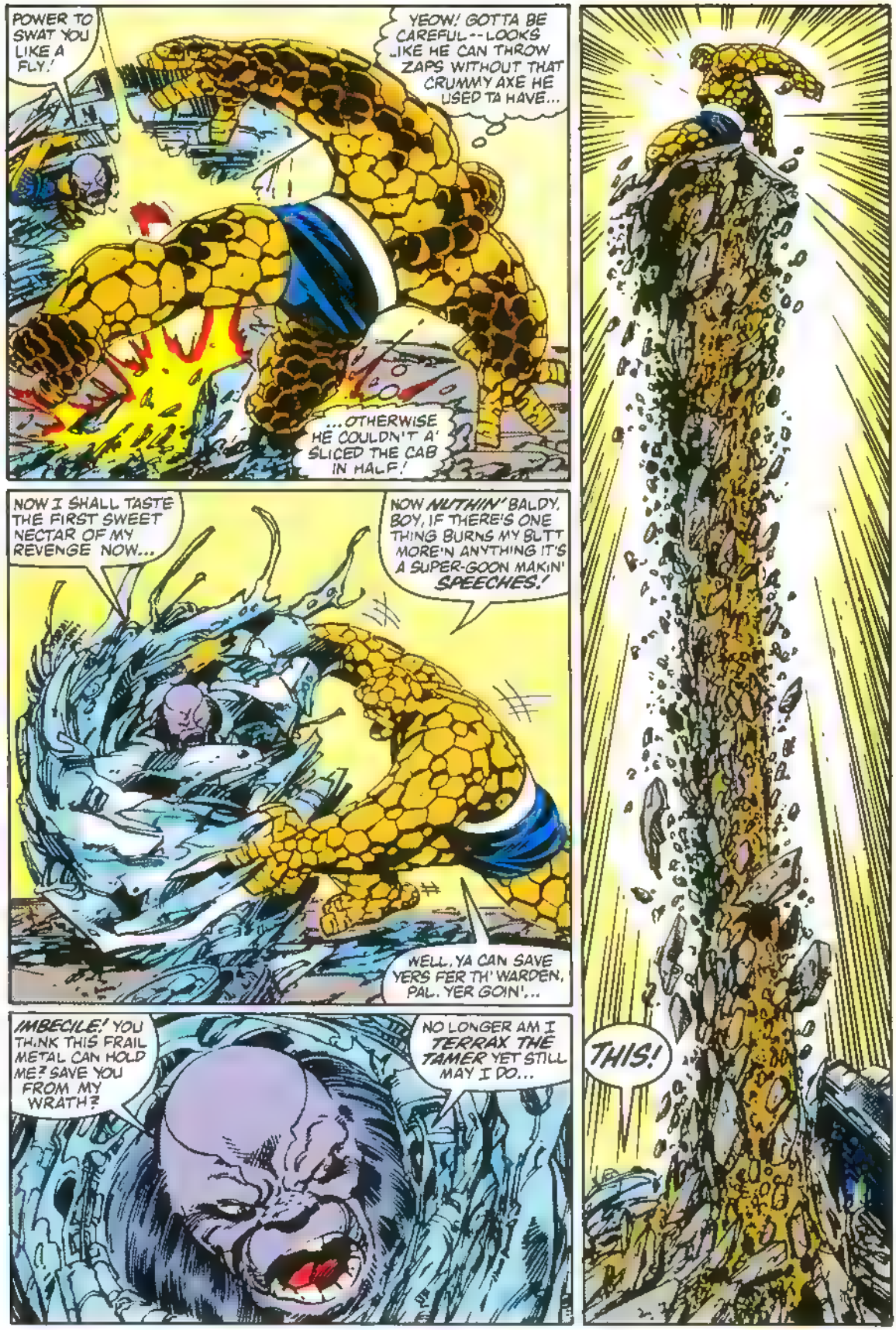
A FEW MINUTES LATER...
WELL, TYROS, IS YOUR QUESTION ANSWERED?
COMPLETELY, DOOM. IT IS AS IF THE SLED IS AN EXTENSION OF MY OWN BODY.
THEN GO, TYROS
GO AND SEEK YOU OUR ENEMIES.
I AM GONE, DOOM. AND THE LIVES OF THE ACCURSED QUARTET CAN NOW BE MEASURED IN HOURS!
MASTER, I MUST QUESTION THE WISDOM OF THIS COURSE OF ACTION. WITH THE ALIEN TYROS THUS EMPOWERED...
HE PRESENTS NO MORE THREAT TO ME THAN DID HAUPTMANN, ROBOT. I HAVE NOT, YOU SEE, TOLD TYROS QUITE THE ENTIRE TRUTH.
THE TECHNO-SUIT HE WEARS DOES MORE THAN CONTROL THE ENERGIES NOW RAMPANT WITHIN HIM. IT SERVES ALSO AS A LIFE-SUPPORT SYSTEM, DELAYING THE DESTRUCTION MET BY HAUPTMANN.
TYROS HAS NO MORE THAN FIVE HOURS OF LIFE, BEFORE THE SUIT BURNS OUT AND THE POWER COSMIC CONSUMES HIM.
BUT THAT WILL BE ENOUGH TIME FOR HIM TO SUBJUGATE REED RICHARDS AND HIS THREE PARTNERS. THEN I SHALL DELIVER THE COUP DE GRACE...
THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

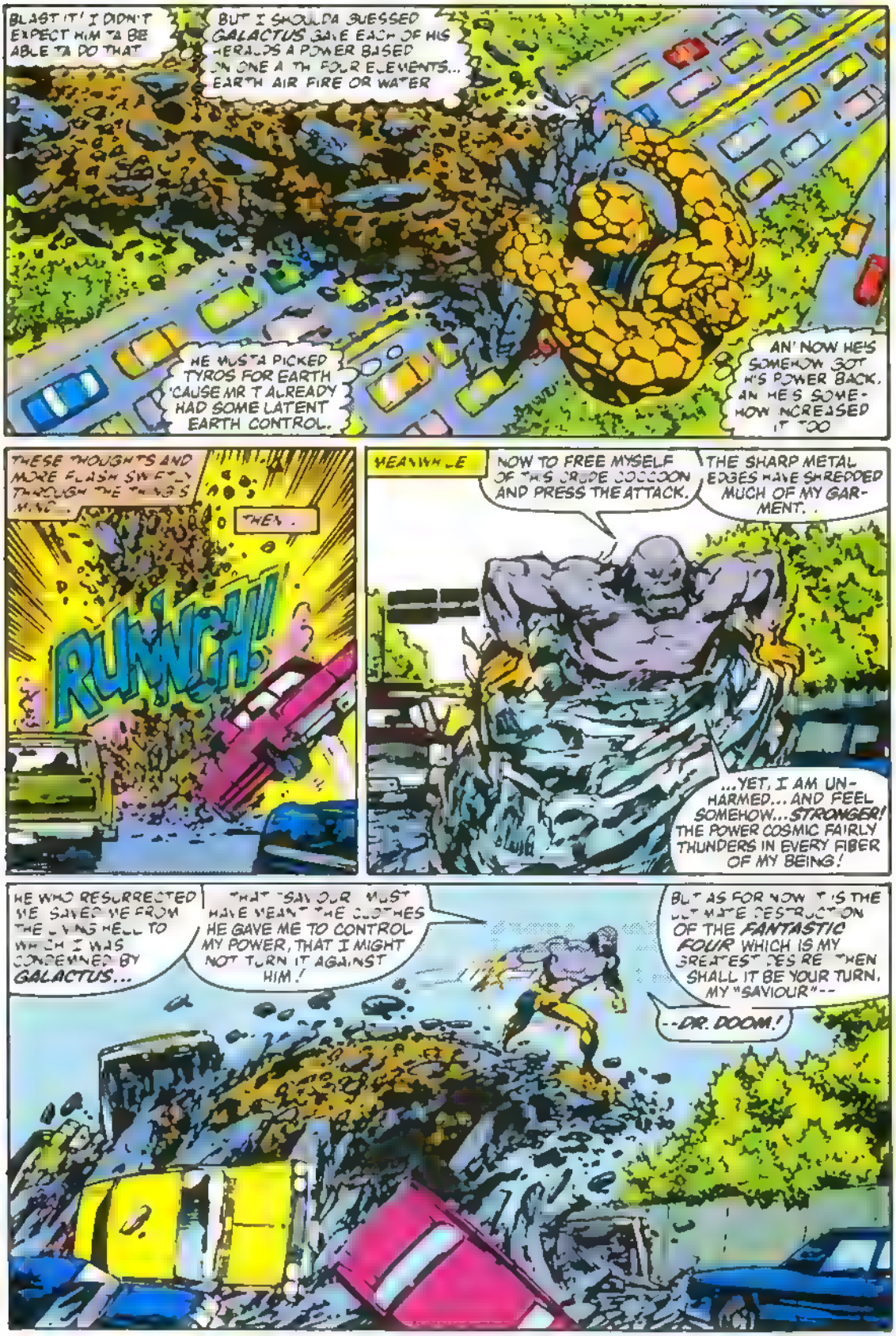

A SHORT TIME LATER...
...A SLEEK DC-9 WINGS IN OVER NEW YORK'S BUSTLING LA GUARDIA AIRPORT...
...THERE TO DISGORGE A VERY NERVOUS GROUP OF PASSENGERS...
I...I'VE NEVER HAD SUCH A TERRIFYING FLIGHT!
ME NEITHER! I KEPT EXPECTING US T' GET BLOWN OUTTA TH' SKY!
THIS IS ABSOLUTELY OUTRAGEOUS! YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO SUBJECT YOUR PASSENGERS TO SUCH DANGERS!
WHAT GIVES? I THOUGHT THEY HAD GOOD WEATHER...
CHECK THE PASSENGER LIST.
"BEN GRIMM IS ON THAT FLIGHT!"
JUST GREAT! AS IF IT WEREN'T ROUGH ENOUGH FOR ME THE PAST COUPLA DAYS...
...I GOTTA WIND UP WITH A PLANE FULLA FOLKS WHO TREAT ME LIKE I WUZ TYPHOID MARY!
DOES IT HAFTA BE THAT WAY EVERY TIME ONE OF TH' FF USES PUBLIC TRANSPORT?
DOES EVERYBODY THINK ONE OF OUR ENEMIES IS GONNA ATTACK US ANY SECOND?
AW... NUTS! I JUST NEED TA GET HOME AND INTA A NICE HOT BATH.
TH' BAXTER BUILDING, PAL AN' STEP ON IT!
H-HOLY CATS! YOU'RE THE THING!
GO T TH HEAD OF TH' CLASS BRIGHT BOY NOW GET ROLLIN', WILL YA?
THUS THE CAB MERGES INTO THE STEEL AND RUBBER SNAKE SLITHERING SLOWLY TOWARDS THE MIDTOWN TUNNEL...
...AS THE THOUGHTS OF THE MIGHTY-MUSCLED THING TURN TO DARKNESS...


WHEN I THINK A' HOW GLAD I WUZ TA HEAR REED SAY TH' FF AIN'T GONNA BREAK UP, EVEN THOUGH HIM AN' SUZIE ARE MOVIN' OUTTA TH' BAXTER BUILDING...
...IT DON'T HARDLY SEEM POSSIBLE I COULD GET TURNED AROUND SO MUCH IN JUST A COUPLA DAYS. BUT MY FAITH IN HUMAN NATURE'S TAKEN A HECKUVA POUNDIN' LATELY
MAKES ME WONDER IF I'M REALLY CUT OUT FER TH' SUPER-HERO BIZ NOT MUCH ELSE A FREAK LIKE ME CAN DO, BUT...
HOLY COW!
WHAT TH' BLUE BLAZES WUZ THAT!?!
TAXI
AW NO! NOT YOU!
IT CAN'T BE YOU!

BUT IT IS FOOL! IT IS!! THOUGH YOU MAY HAVE THOUGHT ME DEAD BY THE HAND OF WORLD-DEVOURING GALACTUS, I AM RISEN, MORE POWERFUL THAN EVER I WAS BEFORE
NOW AND FOREVER MORE AM I TYROS THE TERRIBLE!
SO IT'S BACK TA TYROS HUH? WELL, I WUZ NEVER MUCH IMPRESSED WHEN YA WERE WORKIN FOR GALACTUS AN' CALLIN' YERSELF TERRAX EITHER!
TH' WAY I SEE IT, PAL, A BOZO BY ANY NAME STILL AIN'T GONNA SMELL LIKE A ROSE...


...OR, TA PUT THAT ANOTHER WAY...
IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!
SKA-RAW!
FOOL! STUPID PUNY FOOL! YOU DARE PIT YOUR PUNY STRENGTH AGAINST THE CONSUMMATE POWER OF TYROS?
MINE IS THE POWER COSMIC! THE ULTIMATE POWER OF GALACTUS HIMSELF!


POWER TO SWAT YOU LIKE A FLY.'
YEOW! GOTTA BE CAREFUL--LOOKS LIKE HE CAN THROW ZAPS WITHOUT THAT CRUMMY AXE HE USED TA HAVE...
...OTHERWISE HE COULDN'T A' SLICED THE CAB IN HALF!
NOW I SHALL TASTE THE FIRST SWEET NECTAR OF MY REVENGE NOW...
NOW NUTHIN' BALDY, BOY, IF THERE'S ONE THING BURNS MY BUTT MORE'N ANYTHING IT'S A SUPER-GOON MAKIN' SPEECHES!
WELL, YA CAN SAVE YERS FER TH' WARDEN, PAL. YER GOIN'...
IMBECILE! YOU THINK THIS FRAIL METAL CAN HOLD ME? SAVE YOU FROM MY WRATH?
NO LONGER AM I TERRAX THE TAMER YET STILL MAY I DO...
THIS!


BLAST IT! I DIDN'T EXPECT HIM TA BE ABLE TA DO THAT
BUT I SHOULDA SUESSED GALACTUS GAVE EACH OF HIS HERALDS A POWER BASED ON ONE A TH FOUR ELEMENTS... EARTH AIR FIRE OR WATER
HE MUSTA PICKED TYROS FOR EARTH 'CAUSE MR T ALREADY HAD SOME LATENT EARTH CONTROL.
AN' NOW HE'S SOMEHOW GOT HIS POWER BACK. AN HE'S SOMEHOW INCREASED IT TOO
THESE THOUGHTS AND MORE FLASH SWIFTLY THROUGH THE THING'S MIND...
THEN...
RUNNGH!
MEANWHILE
NOW TO FREE MYSELF OF THIS CRUDE COCOON AND PRESS THE ATTACK.
THE SHARP METAL EDGES HAVE SHREDDED MUCH OF MY GARMENT...
...YET, I AM UNHARMED... AND FEEL SOMEHOW... STRONGER! THE POWER COSMIC FAIRLY THUNDERS IN EVERY FIBER OF MY BEING!
HE WHO RESURRECTED ME SAVED ME FROM THE LIVING HELL TO WHICH I WAS CONDEMNED BY GALACTUS...
THAT "SAVIOUR" MUST HAVE MEANT THE CLOTHES HE GAVE ME TO CONTROL MY POWER, THAT I MIGHT NOT TURN IT AGAINST HIM!
BUT AS FOR NOW, 'TIS THE ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR WHICH IS MY GREATEST DESIRE! THEN SHALL IT BE YOUR TURN, MY "SAVIOUR"--
--DR. DOOM!

NOT FAR AWAY...

MAN-O-MAN! JUST ABOUT .. SHOOK HANDS... WITH TH' REAPER THAT TIME!

NOW, WHERE DID I GET DUMPED...?

AW, NO! RIGHT IN FRONT OF A SUPERMARKET!

SHOP-RITE

THERE'S CIVILIANS ALL OVER TH PLACE GOTTA CHASE 'EM OUTTA HERE BEFORE...

HUH?

THE TIME HAS COME, BEN GRIMM THE MOMENT OF YOUR ANNIHILATION IS AT LAST AT HAND!

BETTER MEN THAN YOU HAVE SAID THAT, BUNKY, AN I'M STILL HERE.

DO YER WORST!

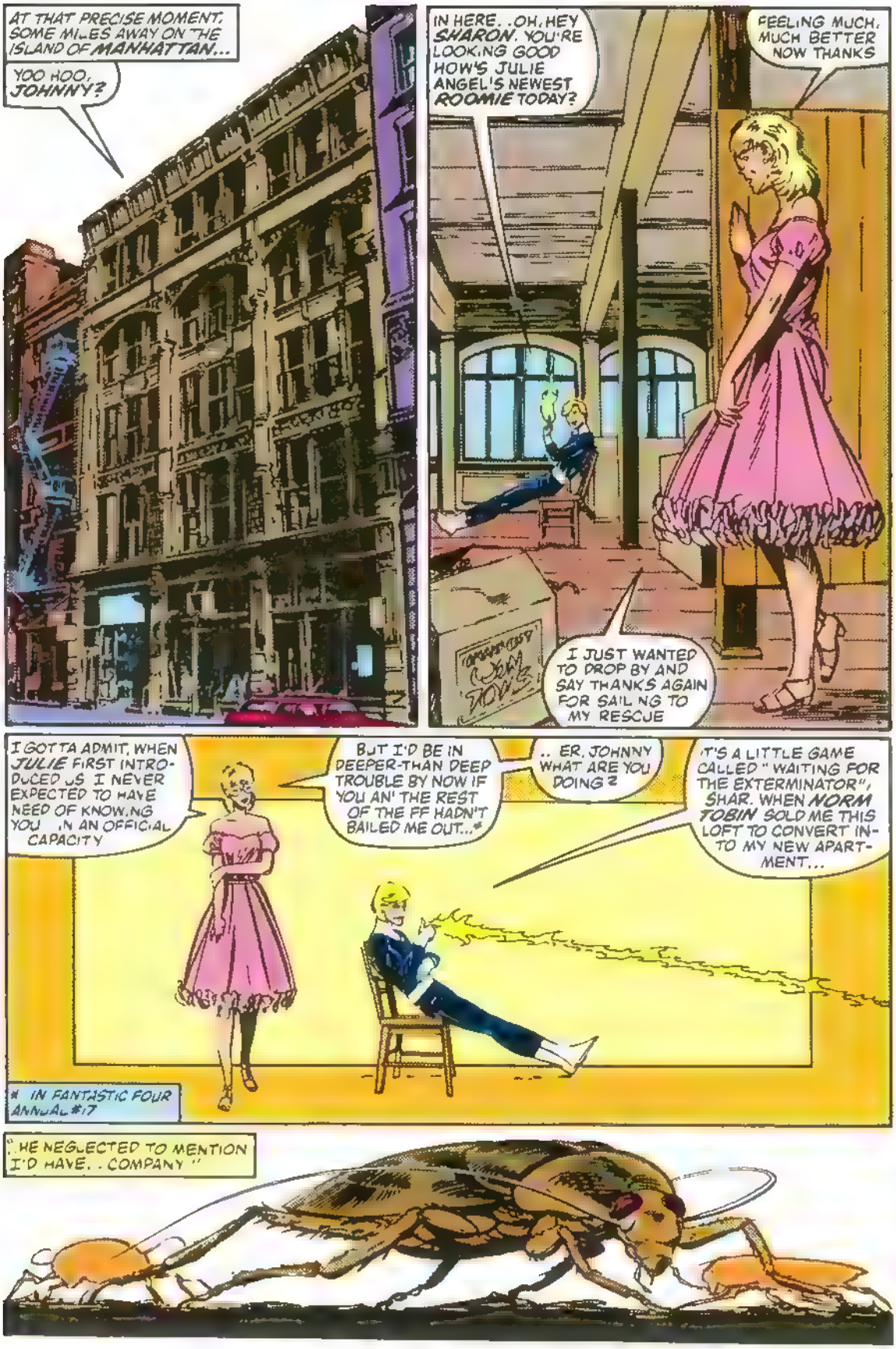
LOOK AT THESE VALUES

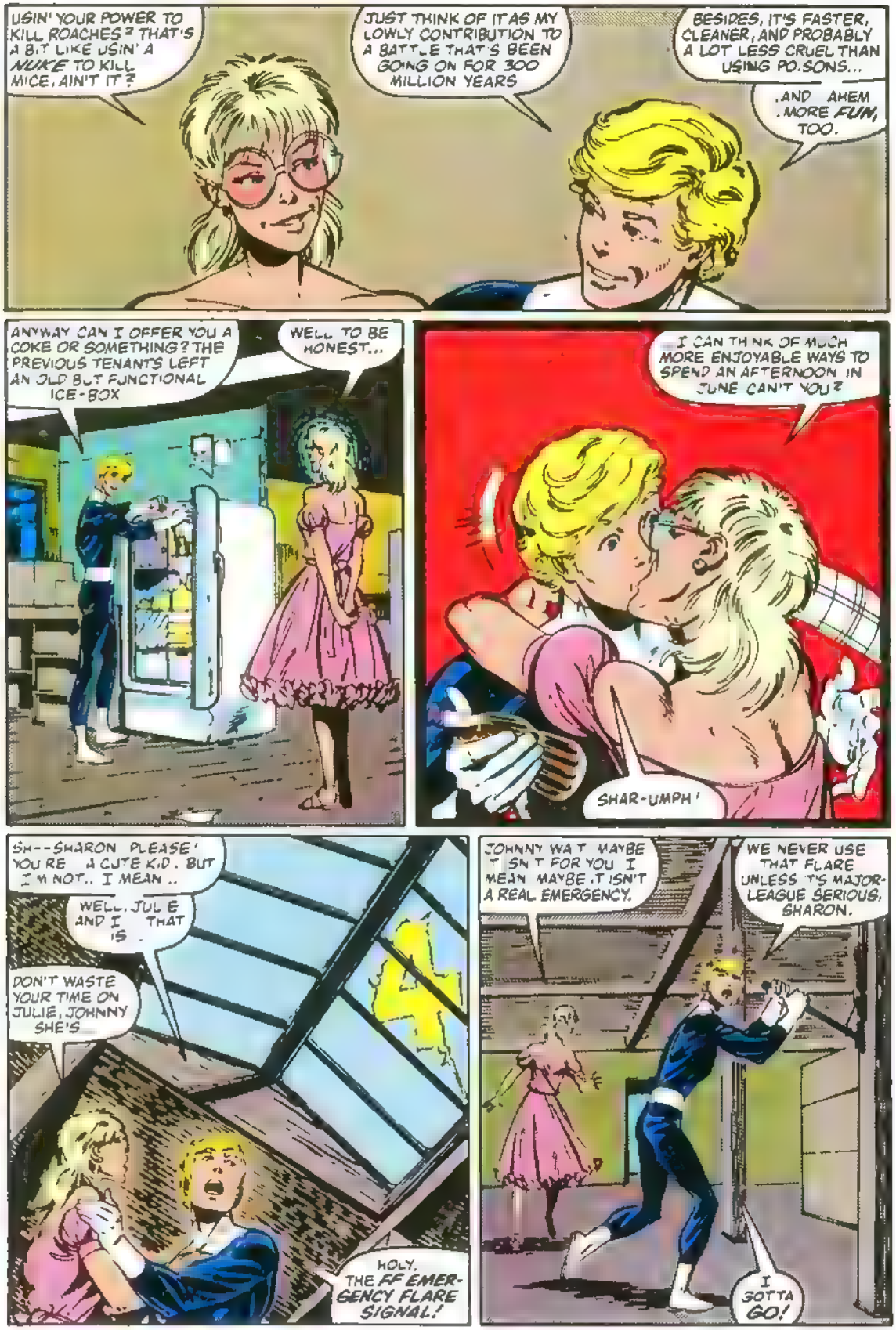
ZAPPO ROACH KILLER $1.29

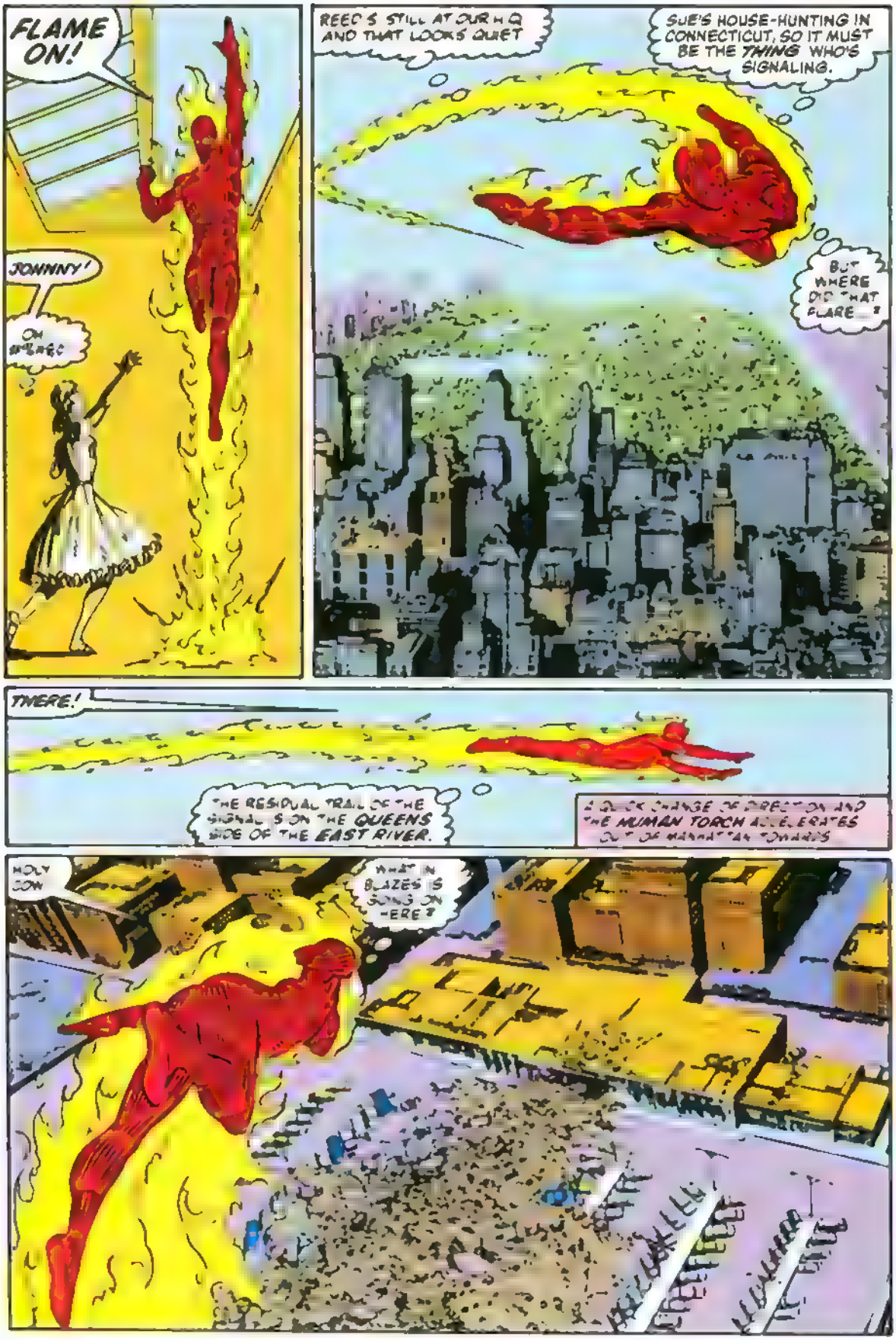
FLEEN

DAIRY

98¢ A DOZEN

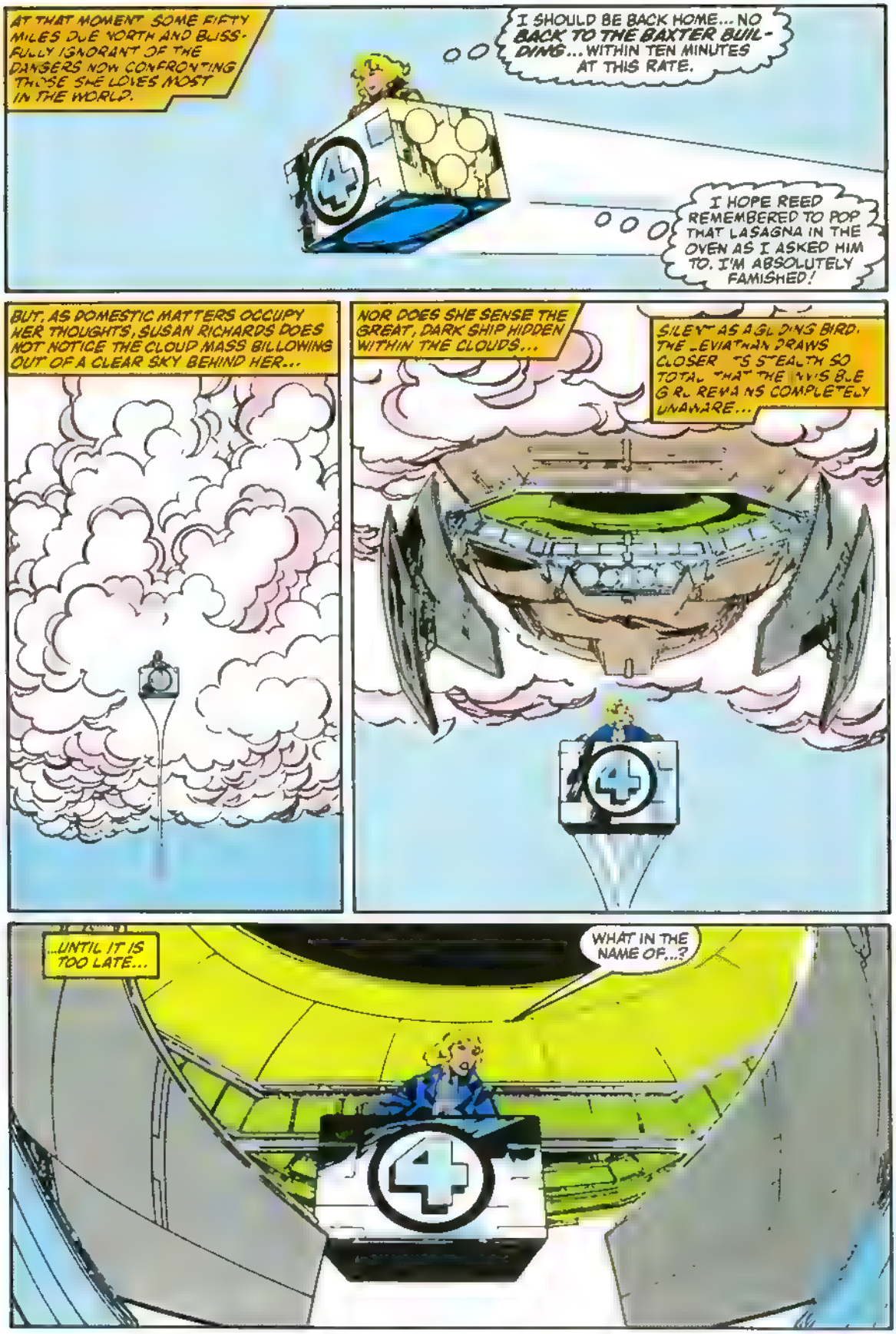

AT THAT PRECISE MOMENT, SOME MILES AWAY ON THE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN...
YOO HOO, JOHNNY?
IN HERE. . OH, HEY SHARON. YOU'RE LOOKING GOOD HOW'S JULIE ANGEL'S NEWEST ROOMIE TODAY?
FEELING MUCH, MUCH BETTER NOW THANKS
I JUST WANTED TO DROP BY AND SAY THANKS AGAIN FOR SAILING TO MY RESCUE
I GOTTA ADMIT, WHEN JULIE FIRST INTRODUCED US I NEVER EXPECTED TO HAVE NEED OF KNOWING YOU IN AN OFFICIAL CAPACITY
BUT I'D BE IN DEEPER-THAN DEEP TROUBLE BY NOW IF YOU AN' THE REST OF THE FF HADN'T BAILED ME OUT...*
.. ER, JOHNNY WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
IT'S A LITTLE GAME CALLED "WAITING FOR THE EXTERMINATOR", SHAR. WHEN NORM TOBIN SOLD ME THIS LOFT TO CONVERT INTO MY NEW APARTMENT...
* IN FANTASTIC FOUR ANNUAL #17
". . HE NEGLECTED TO MENTION I'D HAVE. . COMPANY "

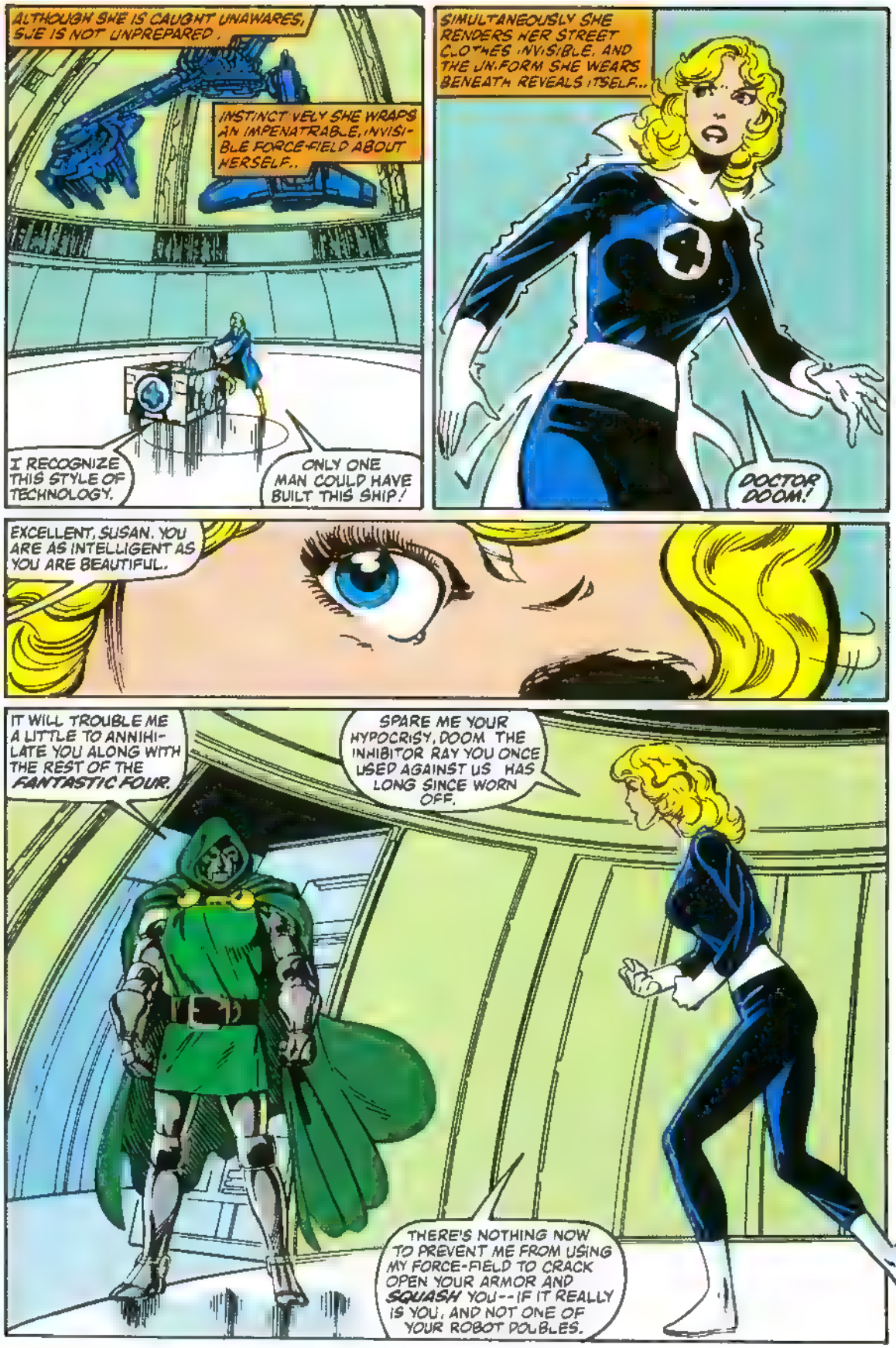

USIN' YOUR POWER TO KILL ROACHES? THAT'S A BIT LIKE USIN' A NUKE TO KILL MICE, AIN'T IT?
JUST THINK OF IT AS MY LOWLY CONTRIBUTION TO A BATTLE THAT'S BEEN GOING ON FOR 300 MILLION YEARS
BESIDES, IT'S FASTER, CLEANER, AND PROBABLY A LOT LESS CRUEL THAN USING POISONS...
...AND AHEM ...MORE FUN, TOO.
ANYWAY CAN I OFFER YOU A COKE OR SOMETHING? THE PREVIOUS TENANTS LEFT AN OLD BUT FUNCTIONAL ICE-BOX
WELL TO BE HONEST...
I CAN THINK OF MUCH MORE ENJOYABLE WAYS TO SPEND AN AFTERNOON IN JUNE CAN'T YOU?
SHAR-UMPH!
SH--SHARON PLEASE! YOU'RE A CUTE KID. BUT I'M NOT.. I MEAN..
WELL, JULIE AND I THAT IS.
DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME ON JULIE, JOHNNY SHE'S
HOLY, THE FF EMERGENCY FLARE SIGNAL!
JOHNNY WAIT MAYBE IT ISN'T FOR YOU I MEAN MAYBE IT ISN'T A REAL EMERGENCY.
WE NEVER USE THAT FLARE UNLESS IT'S MAJOR-LEAGUE SERIOUS, SHARON.
I GOTTA GO!

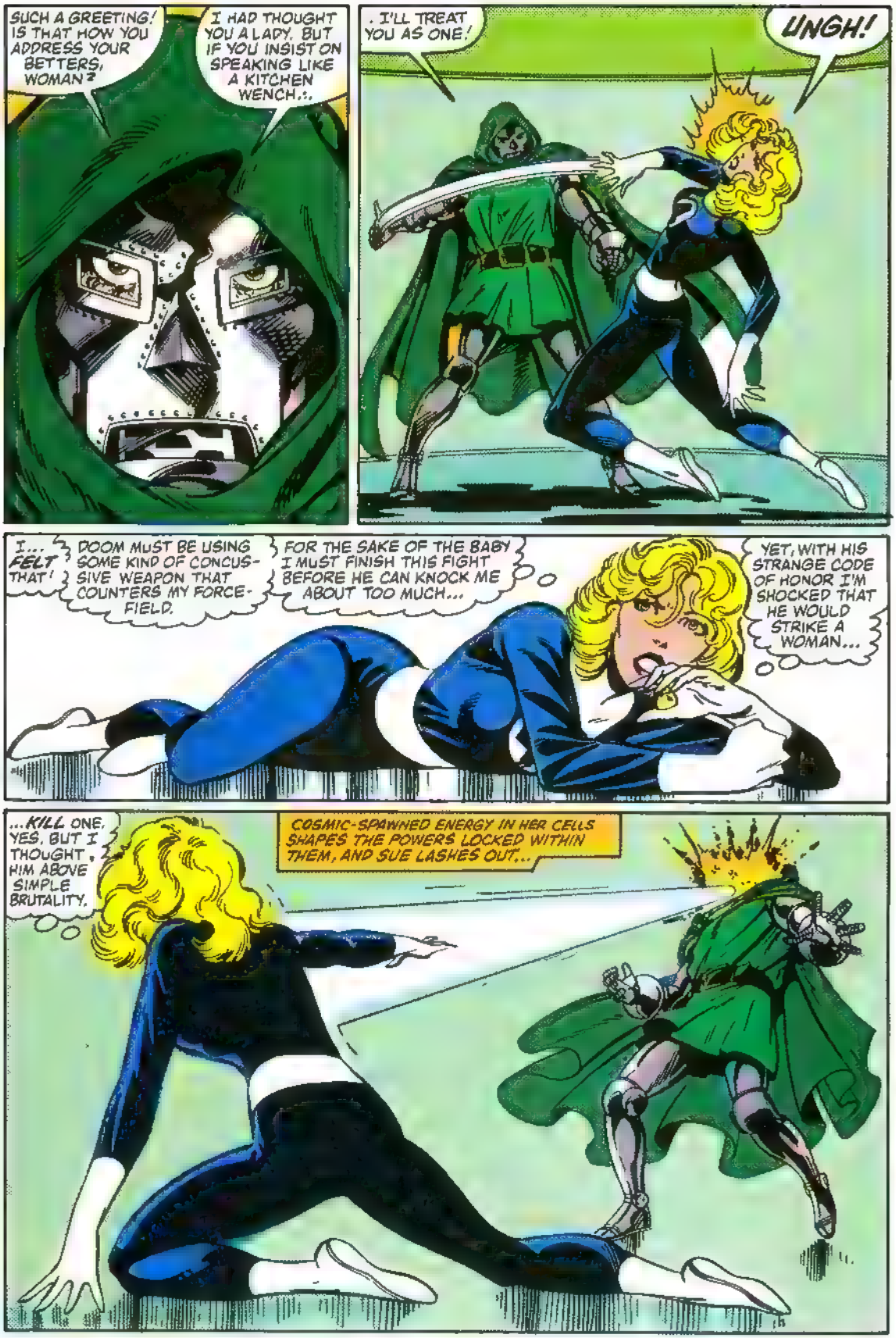

FLAME ON!
JOHNNY!
OH MY GOD!
REED'S STILL AT OUR H.Q. AND THAT LOOKS QUIET
SUE'S HOUSE-HUNTING IN CONNECTICUT, SO IT MUST BE THE THING WHO'S SIGNALING.
BUT WHERE DID THAT FLARE...?
THERE!
THE RESIDUAL TRAIL OF THE SIGNAL IS ON THE QUEENS SIDE OF THE EAST RIVER.
A QUICK CHANGE OF DIRECTION AND THE HUMAN TORCH ACCELERATES OUT OF MANHATTAN TOWARDS
HOLY COW
WHAT IN BLAZES IS GOING ON HERE?

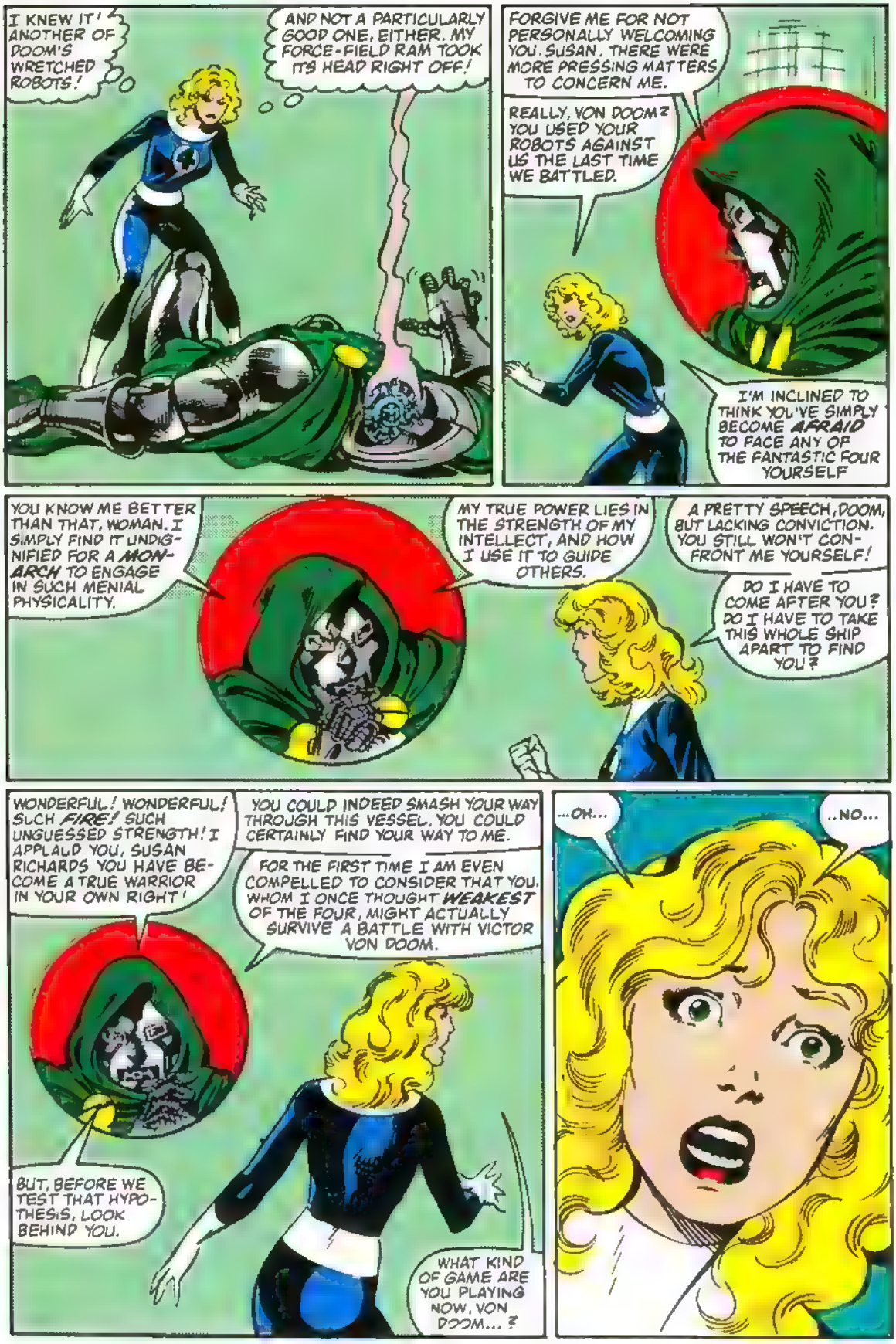
UNAWARE OF HIS BROTHER IN-LAW'S DISCOVERY AS HE IS OF THE THING'S EARLIER SIGNAL, AT THAT MOMENT THE LEADER OF THE F.F. GUIDES HIS UNIQUE CRAFT TOWARD
AVENGERS MANSION
MY INSTRUMENTS SHOW THEIR SECURITY SCANNERS HAVE ALREADY IDENTIFIED AND CLEARED ME FOR LANDING
GOOD MORNING, REED I'M SO GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT TODAY.
ALWAYS HAPPY TO BE OF HELP, WANDA. HOW IS YOUR HUSBAND FARING?
NO GOOD. THAT IS THERE'S BEEN NO FURTHER DEGENERATION IN HIS CONDITION BUT HE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE IMPROVING EITHER.
CURIOUS THE VISION'S BIO-SYNTHETIC SYSTEMS ARE OF COURSE UNLIKE ANY OTHER ON EARTH BUT I WAS CERTAIN HE'D BE ON THE MEND BY NOW*
*THE VISION WAS INEXPLICABLY FELLED BY A NULL-FIELD IN AVENGERS #233--EDITORIAL.
SOME HOURS LATER IN THE BASEMENT MEDICAL SECTION...
IT LOOKS AS IF THIS IS GOING TO TAKE LONGER THAN WE THOUGHT REED WOULD YOU CARE FOR SOME TEA?
HM? OH YES THANK YOU WANDA IT DOES SEEM THE VISION'S CONDITION IS MORE COMPLEX THAN I HAD ANTICIPATED
THE SCARLET WITCH HOLDS BACK A TEAR AND LEAVES REED RICHARDS TO HIS WORK.

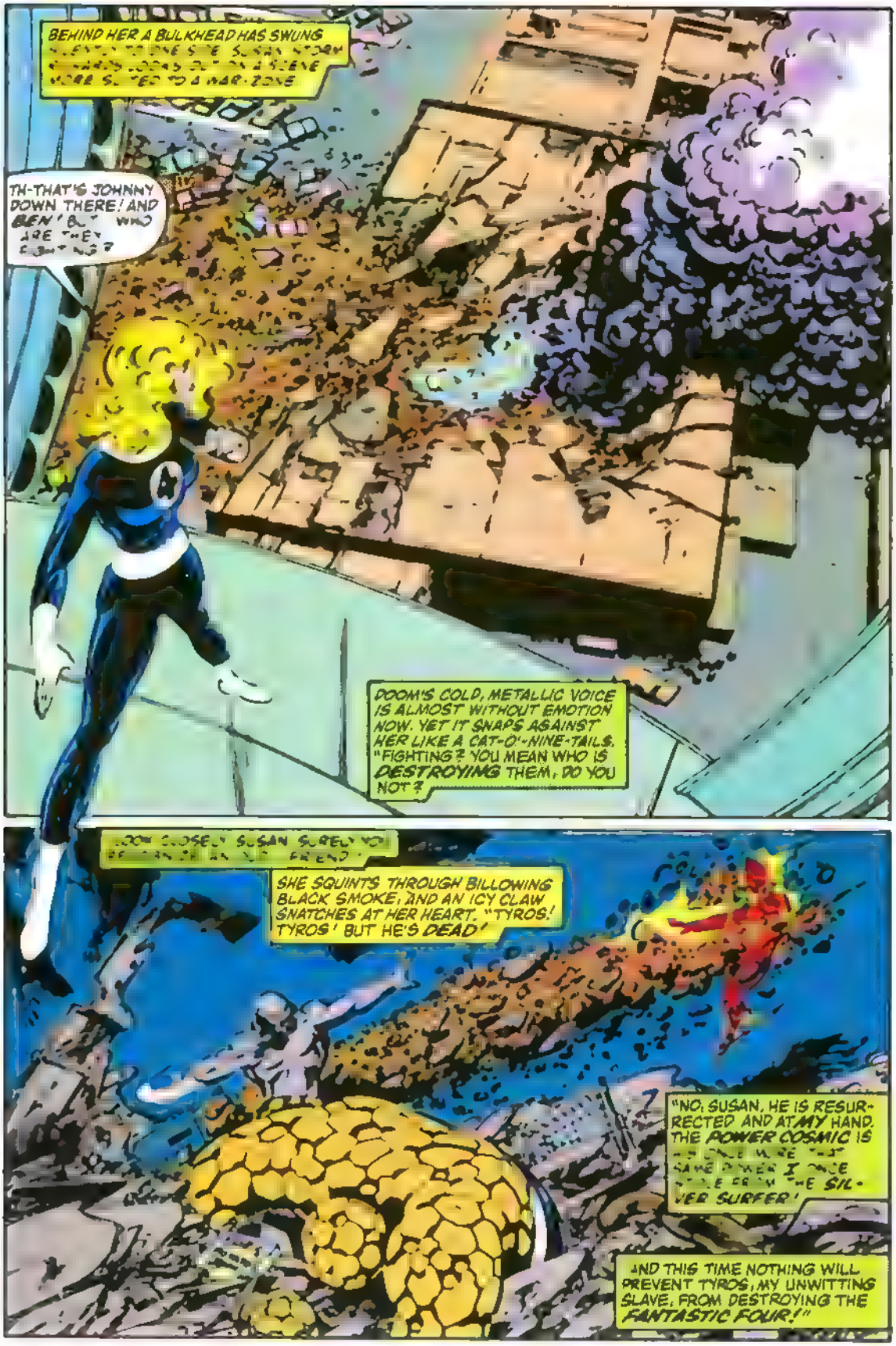
MOVING QUICKLY TO THE REST AND RECREATION CHAMBER ON THE SAME LEVEL, WANDA SETS HERSELF TO THE PLEASANTLY PEDESTRIAN TASK OF MAKING TEA.
BUT THE THOUGHTS WHICH FILL HER SOLITUDE ARE FAR FROM MUNDANE...
IT'S ALL SO MAD. IT'S AS IF THE FATES ARE COMBINING TO SHATTER MY HARD-WON SECURITY.
LOOK WHAT'S HAPPENED TO ME IN ONLY A FEW SHORT WEEKS! I'VE SEEN MY DEAR BROTHER GO WITH THE INHUMANS TO THEIR NEW HOME IN THE MOON'S BLUE AREA.
I'VE LEARNED THAT MAGNETO IS MY TRUE FATHER--MAGNETO, ONCE THE GREATEST OF ALL EARTHLY VILLAINS.
HE CLAIMS TO HAVE REFORMED, BUT HOW CAN ONE WITH HIS PAST RECORD BE TRUSTED?
NOW MY BELOVED HUSBAND LIES AS NEAR TO DEATH AS ONE UNLIVING CAN...
OH!
THE INTRUDER ALERT! THE MANSION HAS BEEN BREECHED!
ALL OTHER THOUGHTS ARE BANISHED. THE SCARLET WITCH WHO RACES THROUGH THE CORRIDORS IS NOW A COMPETENT, BATTLE-PRIMED AVENGER!
IT'S COMING FROM THE MEDICAL SECTION!
REED!
REED?
BUT MISTER FANTASTIC IS GONE.
AND THE SMOULDERING BLAST-HOLE IN THE FAR WALL SEEMS TO LAUGH AT HER!


AT THAT MOMENT SOME FIFTY MILES DUE NORTH AND BLISSFULLY IGNORANT OF THE DANGERS NOW CONFRONTING THOSE SHE LOVES MOST IN THE WORLD...
I SHOULD BE BACK HOME... NO BACK TO THE BAXTER BUILDING... WITHIN TEN MINUTES AT THIS RATE.
I HOPE REED REMEMBERED TO POP THAT LASAGNA IN THE OVEN AS I ASKED HIM TO. I'M ABSOLUTELY FAMISHED!
BUT, AS DOMESTIC MATTERS OCCUPY HER THOUGHTS, SUSAN RICHARDS DOES NOT NOTICE THE CLOUD MASS BILLOWING OUT OF A CLEAR SKY BEHIND HER...
NOR DOES SHE SENSE THE GREAT, DARK SHIP HIDDEN WITHIN THE CLOUDS...
SILENT AS A GLIDING BIRD, THE LEVIATHAN DRAWS CLOSER ITS STEALTH SO TOTAL THAT THE INVISIBLE GIRL REMAINS COMPLETELY UNAWARE...
...UNTIL IT IS TOO LATE...
WHAT IN THE NAME OF...?

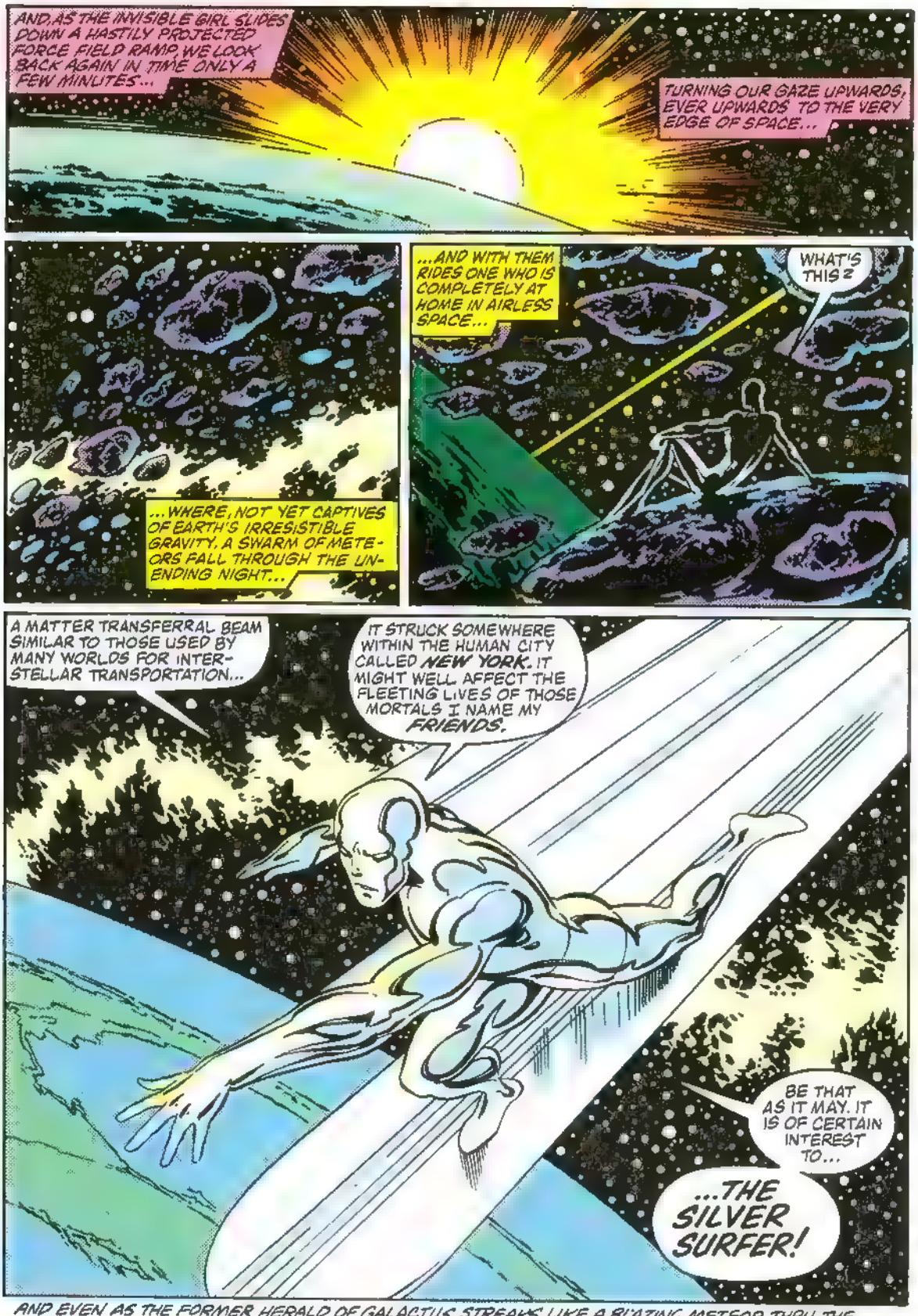

ALTHOUGH SHE IS CAUGHT UNAWARES, SUE IS NOT UNPREPARED.
INSTINCTIVELY SHE WRAPS AN IMPENATRABLE, INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD ABOUT HERSELF..
I RECOGNIZE THIS STYLE OF TECHNOLOGY.
ONLY ONE MAN COULD HAVE BUILT THIS SHIP!
SIMULTANEOUSLY SHE RENDERS HER STREET CLOTHES INVISIBLE, AND THE UNIFORM SHE WEARS BENEATH REVEALS ITSELF..
DOCTOR DOOM!
EXCELLENT, SUSAN. YOU ARE AS INTELLIGENT AS YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL.
IT WILL TROUBLE ME A LITTLE TO ANNIHILATE YOU ALONG WITH THE REST OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
SPARE ME YOUR HYPOCRISY, DOOM. THE INHIBITOR RAY YOU ONCE USED AGAINST US HAS LONG SINCE WORN OFF.
THERE'S NOTHING NOW TO PREVENT ME FROM USING MY FORCE-FIELD TO CRACK OPEN YOUR ARMOR AND SQUASH YOU--IF IT REALLY IS YOU, AND NOT ONE OF YOUR ROBOT DOUBLES.


SUCH A GREETING! IS THAT HOW YOU ADDRESS YOUR BETTERS, WOMAN?
I HAD THOUGHT YOU A LADY. BUT IF YOU INSIST ON SPEAKING LIKE A KITCHEN WENCH...
. I'LL TREAT YOU AS ONE!
UNGH!
I... FELT THAT!
DOOM MUST BE USING SOME KIND OF CONCUSSIVE WEAPON THAT COUNTERS MY FORCE-FIELD.
FOR THE SAKE OF THE BABY I MUST FINISH THIS FIGHT BEFORE HE CAN KNOCK ME ABOUT TOO MUCH...
YET, WITH HIS STRANGE CODE OF HONOR I'M SHOCKED THAT HE WOULD STRIKE A WOMAN...
...KILL ONE, YES, BUT I THOUGHT I HIM ABOVE SIMPLE BRUTALITY.
COSMIC-SPAWNED ENERGY IN HER CELLS SHAPES THE POWERS LOCKED WITHIN THEM, AND SUE LASHES OUT...

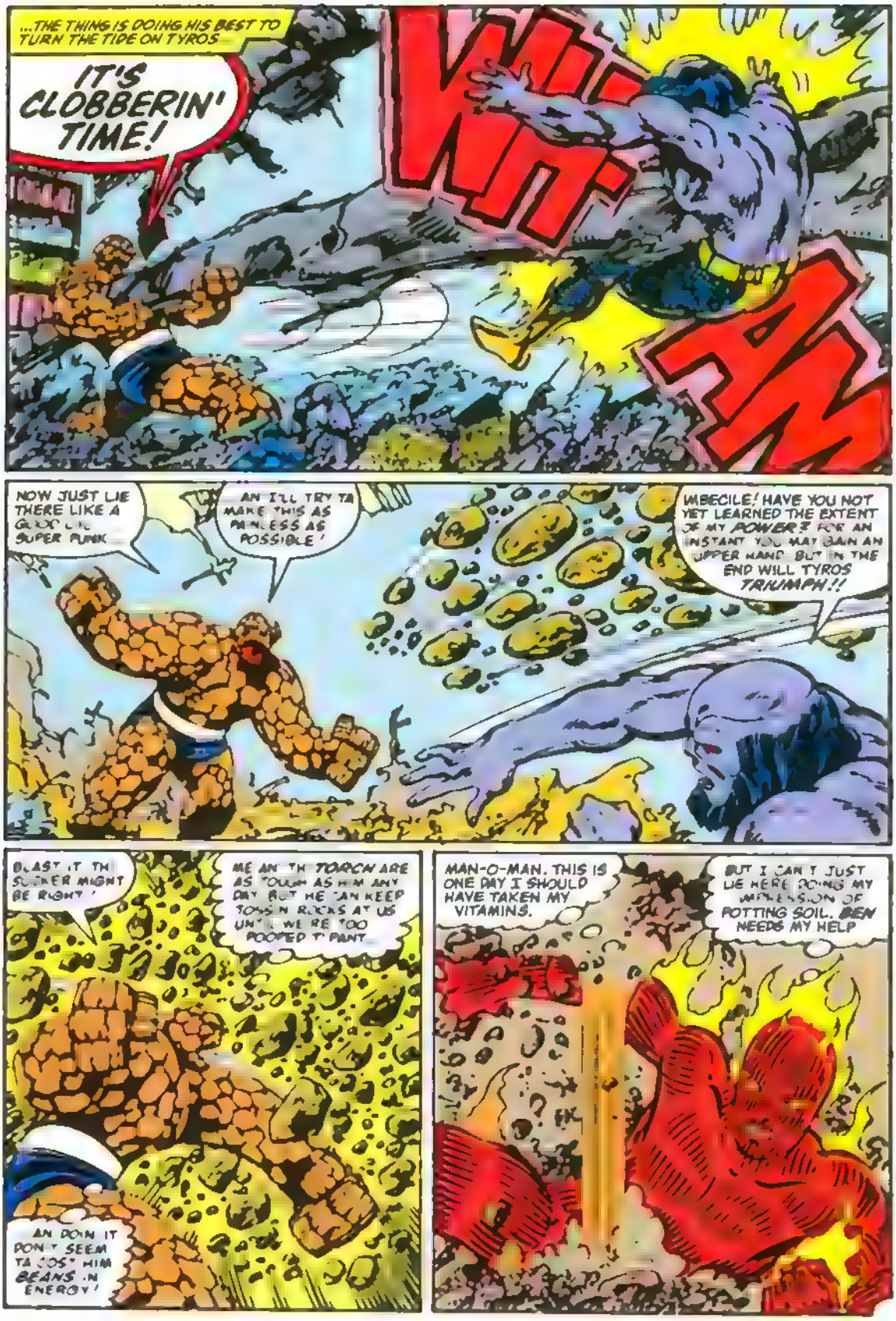

I KNEW IT! ANOTHER OF DOOM'S WRETCHED ROBOTS!
AND NOT A PARTICULARLY GOOD ONE, EITHER. MY FORCE-FIELD RAM TOOK ITS HEAD RIGHT OFF!
FORGIVE ME FOR NOT PERSONALLY WELCOMING YOU, SUSAN. THERE WERE MORE PRESSING MATTERS TO CONCERN ME.
REALLY, VON DOOM? YOU USED YOUR ROBOTS AGAINST US THE LAST TIME WE BATTLED.
I'M INCLINED TO THINK YOU'VE SIMPLY BECOME AFRAID TO FACE ANY OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR YOURSELF
YOU KNOW ME BETTER THAN THAT, WOMAN. I SIMPLY FIND IT UNDIGNIFIED FOR A MONARCH TO ENGAGE IN SUCH MENIAL PHYSICALITY.
MY TRUE POWER LIES IN THE STRENGTH OF MY INTELLECT, AND HOW I USE IT TO GUIDE OTHERS.
A PRETTY SPEECH, DOOM, BUT LACKING CONVICTION. YOU STILL WON'T CONFRONT ME YOURSELF!
DO I HAVE TO COME AFTER YOU? DO I HAVE TO TAKE THIS WHOLE SHIP APART TO FIND YOU?
WONDERFUL! WONDERFUL! SUCH FIRE! SUCH UNGUESSED STRENGTH! I APPLAUD YOU, SUSAN RICHARDS YOU HAVE BECOME A TRUE WARRIOR IN YOUR OWN RIGHT!
YOU COULD INDEED SMASH YOUR WAY THROUGH THIS VESSEL, YOU COULD CERTAINLY FIND YOUR WAY TO ME.
FOR THE FIRST TIME I AM EVEN COMPELLED TO CONSIDER THAT YOU, WHOM I ONCE THOUGHT WEAKEST OF THE FOUR, MIGHT ACTUALLY SURVIVE A BATTLE WITH VICTOR VON DOOM.
BUT, BEFORE WE TEST THAT HYPOTHESIS, LOOK BEHIND YOU.
WHAT KIND OF GAME ARE YOU PLAYING NOW, VON DOOM...?
...OH...
..NO...

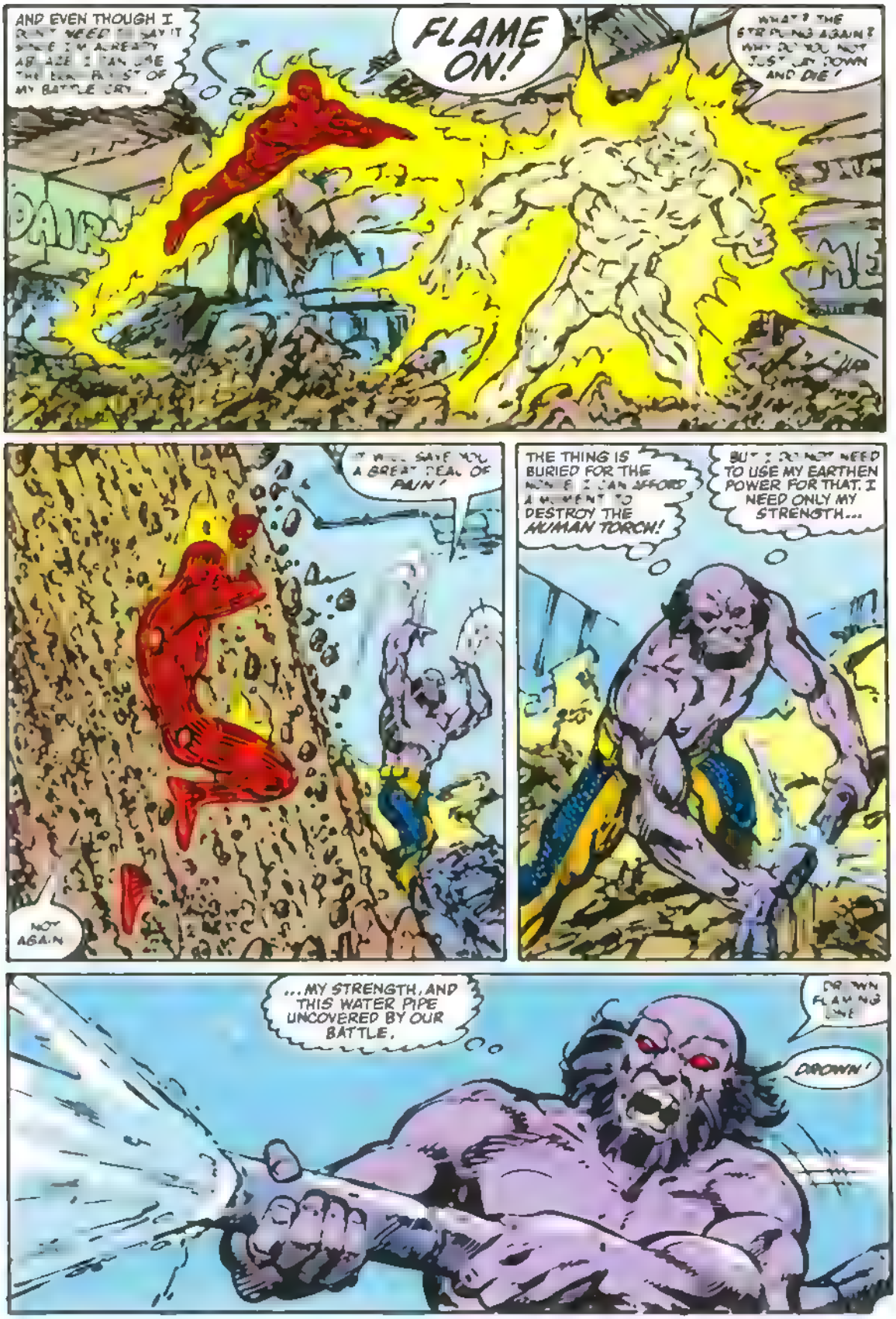

BEHIND HER A BULKHEAD HAS SWUNG SLOWLY TO ONE SIDE. SUSAN STORM STARES LOCKED IN A SCENE MORE SUITED TO A NAR-ZONE
TH-THAT'S JOHNNY DOWN THERE! AND BEN! BUT... WHO ARE THEY FIGHTING?
DOOM'S COLD, METALLIC VOICE IS ALMOST WITHOUT EMOTION NOW. YET IT SNAPS AGAINST HER LIKE A CAT-O'-NINE-TAILS. "FIGHTING? YOU MEAN WHO IS DESTROYING THEM, DO YOU NOT?
LOOK CLOSELY, SUSAN. SURELY YOU RECOGNIZE AN OLD FRIEND.
SHE SQUINTS THROUGH BILLOWING BLACK SMOKE, AND AN ICY CLAW SNATCHES AT HER HEART. "TYROS! TYROS! BUT HE'S DEAD!
"NO, SUSAN. HE IS RESURRECTED AND AT MY HAND. THE POWER COSMIC IS ONCE MORE THAT SAME POWER I ONCE WIELDED FROM THE SILVER SURFER!
AND THIS TIME NOTHING WILL PREVENT TYROS, MY UNWITTING SLAVE, FROM DESTROYING THE FANTASTIC FOUR!"

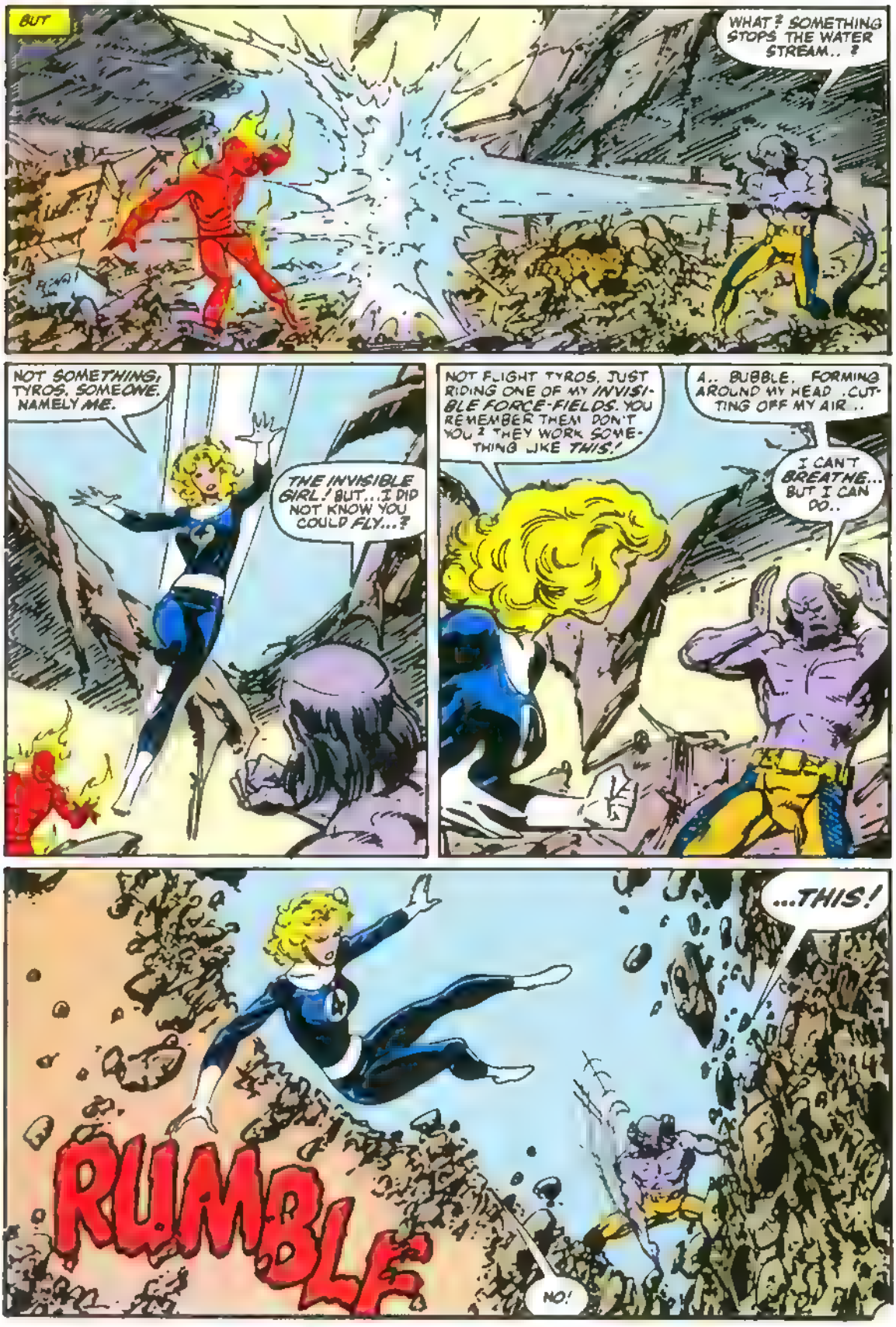
AND SO, I CONFRONT YOU. IT IS THE TRUE VICTOR VON DOOM YOU SEE HERE NOW.
THE CHOICE THEN IS YOURS. ENGAGE ME NOW IN A BATTLE YOU MIGHT SURVIVE...
"...LEAVING YOUR LOVED ONES TO A BATTLE THEY CANNOT POSSIBLY SURVIVE
...OR GO NOW TO THEIR AID, REMEMBERING ALWAYS THAT TO DO SO IS TO FLEE DOOM. TO ACKNOWLEDGE HIM YOUR MASTER!
HIS LOGIC IS FLAWED, WARPED BY HIS UNEQUALED EGO, YET THE CHOICE HE PRESENTS IS PLAIN AND TRUE...
AND IN THE LAST ANALYSIS NO CHOICE AT ALL
CURSE YOU DOOM!


AND, AS THE INVISIBLE GIRL SLIDES DOWN A HASTILY PROJECTED FORCE FIELD RAMP, WE LOOK BACK AGAIN IN TIME ONLY A FEW MINUTES...
TURNING OUR GAZE UPWARDS, EVER UPWARDS TO THE VERY EDGE OF SPACE...
...WHERE, NOT YET CAPTIVES OF EARTH'S IRRESISTIBLE GRAVITY, A SWARM OF METEORS FALL THROUGH THE UNENDING NIGHT...
...AND WITH THEM RIDES ONE WHO IS COMPLETELY AT HOME IN AIRLESS SPACE...
WHAT'S THIS?
A MATTER TRANSFERRAL BEAM SIMILAR TO THOSE USED BY MANY WORLDS FOR INTERSTELLAR TRANSPORTATION...
IT STRUCK SOMEWHERE WITHIN THE HUMAN CITY CALLED NEW YORK. IT MIGHT WELL AFFECT THE FLEETING LIVES OF THOSE MORTALS I NAME MY FRIENDS.
BE THAT AS IT MAY. IT IS OF CERTAIN INTEREST TO...
...THE SILVER SURFER!

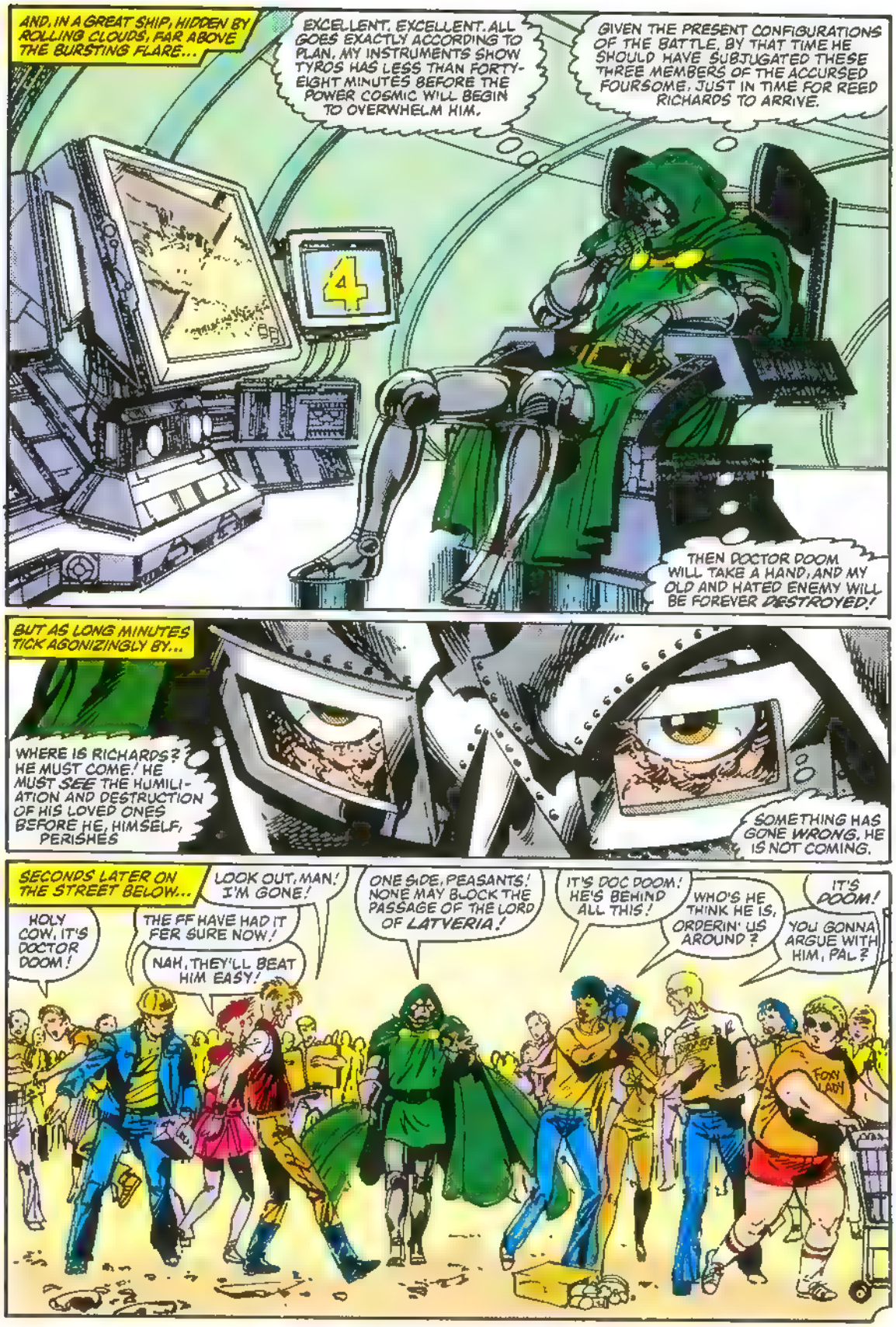
AND EVEN AS THE FORMER HERALD OF GALACTUS STREAKS LIKE A BLAZING METEOR THRU THE SLENDER FILM OF THE EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE...


...THE THING IS DOING HIS BEST TO TURN THE TIDE ON TYROS...
IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!
WHAM
NOW JUST LIE THERE LIKE A GOOD LITTLE SUPER PUNK
AN I'LL TRY TA MAKE THIS AS PAINLESS AS POSSIBLE!
IMBECILE! HAVE YOU NOT YET LEARNED THE EXTENT OF MY POWER? FOR AN INSTANT YOU MAY GAIN AN UPPER HAND BUT IN THE END WILL TYROS TRIUMPH!!
BLAST IT TH SUCKER MIGHT BE RIGHT!
ME AN TH TORCH ARE AS TOUGH AS HIM ANY DAY BUT HE CAN KEEP TOSSIN ROCKS AT US UNTIL WE'RE TOO POOPED T' PUNT...
AN DOIN IT DON'T SEEM TA COST HIM BEANS IN ENERGY!
MAN-O-MAN. THIS IS ONE DAY I SHOULD HAVE TAKEN MY VITAMINS.
BUT I CAN'T JUST LIE HERE DOING MY IMPRESSION OF POTTING SOIL. BEN NEEDS MY HELP


AND EVEN THOUGH I DON'T NEED TO SAY IT SINCE I'M ALREADY ABLAZE I CAN USE THE BARE FIST OF MY BATTLE CRY...
FLAME ON!
WHAT? THE STRIKING AGAIN? WHY DO YOU NOT JUST LIE DOWN AND DIE!
PAIN!
ME!
IT WILL SAVE YOU A GREAT DEAL OF PAIN!
NOT AGAIN
THE THING IS BURIED FOR THE MOMENT AND I CAN AFFORD A MOMENT TO DESTROY THE HUMAN TORCH!
BUT I DO NOT NEED TO USE MY EARTHEN POWER FOR THAT. I NEED ONLY MY STRENGTH...
...MY STRENGTH, AND THIS WATER PIPE UNCOVERED BY OUR BATTLE.
DROWN FLAMING ONE
DROWN!


BUT
WHAT? SOMETHING STOPS THE WATER STREAM..?
NOT SOMETHING, TYROS, SOMEONE. NAMELY ME.
THE INVISIBLE GIRL! BUT...I DID NOT KNOW YOU COULD FLY...?
NOT FLIGHT TYROS, JUST RIDING ONE OF MY INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELDS. YOU REMEMBER THEM DON'T YOU? THEY WORK SOMETHING LIKE THIS!
A.. BUBBLE. FORMING AROUND MY HEAD. CUTTING OFF MY AIR..
I CAN'T BREATHE... BUT I CAN DO..
...THIS!
RUMBLE
NO!

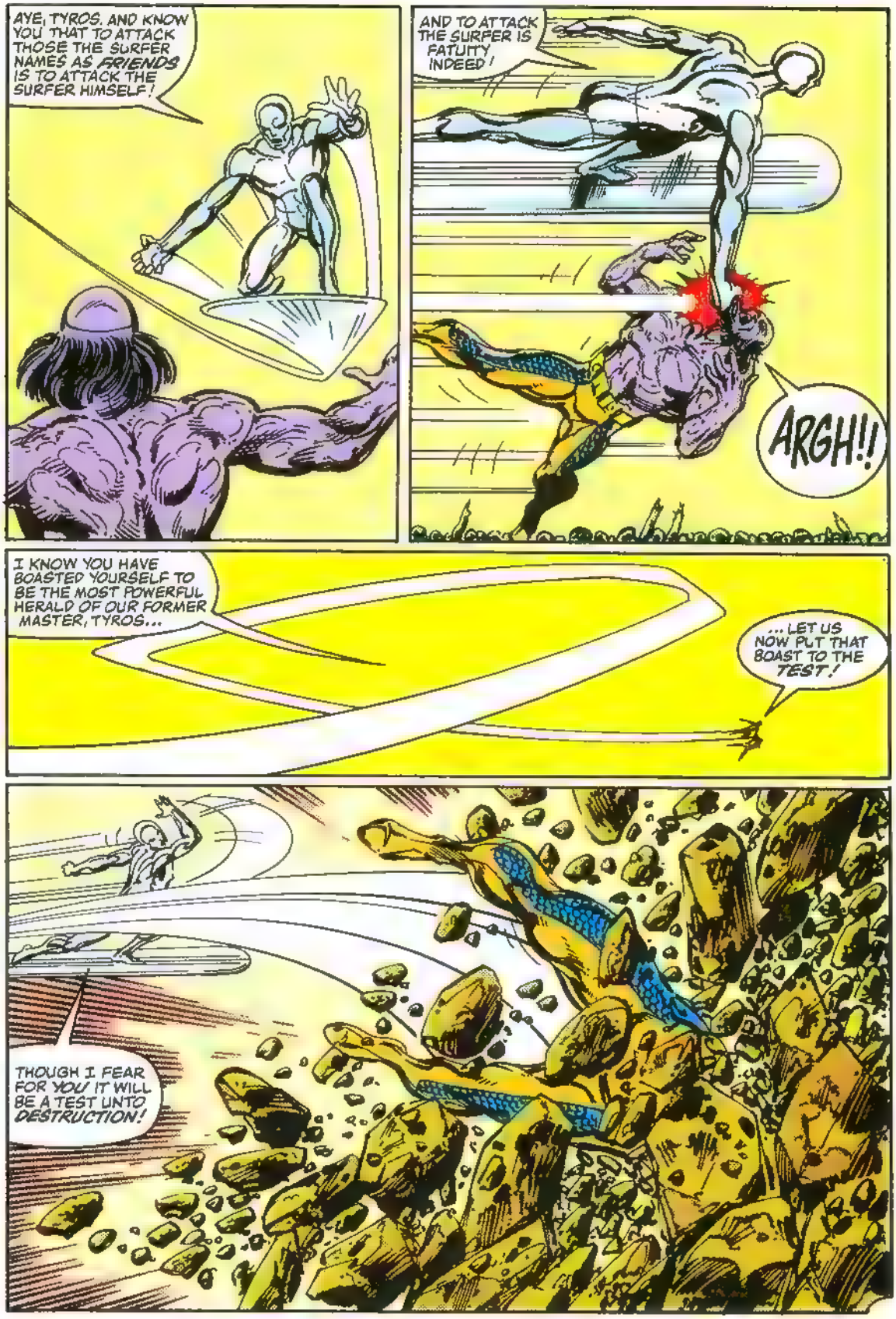
HA HA HA HA FOOLS! FOOLS AND WEAKLINGS! THIS IS ALMOST TOO EASY!
WELL IT AIN'T GONNA BE FER LONG BUTTERCUP! I'D BE HAPPY TA PLAY WITH YA ALL DAY...
BUT WE'VE ALREADY WRECKED A SUPERMARKET AN' IT'S JUST DUMB LUCK NO CIVILIANS GOT KILLED.
SO I GOTTA END THIS FIGHT FAST!
WHAT IN...?!
WAY TO GO BENJAMIN
NOW LET'S PUT TYROS IN LALA LAND BEFORE ANY OF OUR AUDIENCE GETS TOO CLOSE.
I HEAR YA TALKIN KIDDO
IT'S NO USE! EVEN WITH THEIR COMBINED POWERS ALL JOHNNY AND BEN CAN DO IS PROLONG THE BATTLE
WE MUST BRING IT TO AN END!
WE NEED REED!
SECONDS LATER A SOLAR FLARE SOMEWHAT LIGHTS THE AFTERNOON SKY OVER QUEENS.

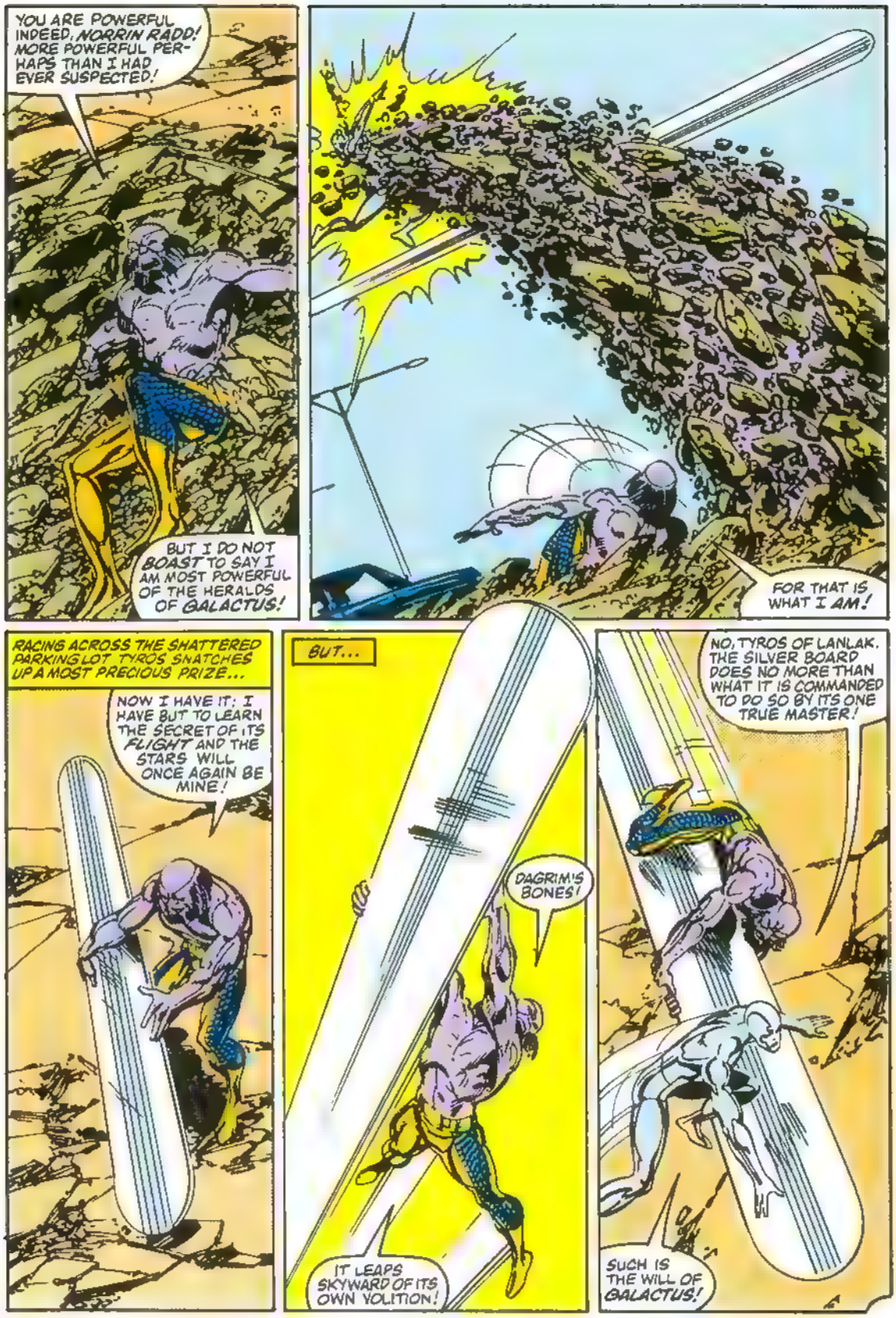

AND, IN A GREAT SHIP, HIDDEN BY ROLLING CLOUDS, FAR ABOVE THE BURSTING FLARE...
EXCELLENT. EXCELLENT. ALL GOES EXACTLY ACCORDING TO PLAN. MY INSTRUMENTS SHOW TYROS HAS LESS THAN FORTY-EIGHT MINUTES BEFORE THE POWER COSMIC WILL BEGIN TO OVERWHELM HIM.
GIVEN THE PRESENT CONFIGURATIONS OF THE BATTLE, BY THAT TIME HE SHOULD HAVE SUBJUGATED THESE THREE MEMBERS OF THE ACCURSED FOURSOME. JUST IN TIME FOR REED RICHARDS TO ARRIVE.
4
THEN DOCTOR DOOM WILL TAKE A HAND, AND MY OLD AND HATED ENEMY WILL BE FOREVER DESTROYED!
BUT AS LONG MINUTES TICK AGONIZINGLY BY...
WHERE IS RICHARDS? HE MUST COME! HE MUST SEE THE HUMILIATION AND DESTRUCTION OF HIS LOVED ONES BEFORE HE, HIMSELF, PERISHES
SOMETHING HAS GONE WRONG. HE IS NOT COMING.
SECONDS LATER ON THE STREET BELOW...
LOOK OUT, MAN! I'M GONE!
ONE SIDE, PEASANTS! NONE MAY BLOCK THE PASSAGE OF THE LORD OF LATVERIA!
IT'S DOC DOOM! HE'S BEHIND ALL THIS!
WHO'S HE THINK HE IS, ORDERIN' US AROUND?
IT'S DOOM!
HOLY COW, IT'S DOCTOR DOOM!
THE FF HAVE HAD IT FER SURE NOW!
NAH, THEY'LL BEAT HIM EASY!
YOU GONNA ARGUE WITH HIM, PAL?

HOLD, TYROS! THE BATTLE IS ENDED! WE WILL NOT DESTROY THE FANTASTIC FOUR WITHOUT REED R.CHARDS PRESENT!
DO NOT ORDER ME, HUMAN TYROS IS NOT YOURS TO COMMAND!
THEN TYROS IS DEAD!
YEOW!
YOU DARE! YOU DARE ATTACK TYROS THE TERRIBLE? YOU DARE ATTACK A WIELDER OF THE POWER COSMIC?!
YOU ARE A FOOL, DOOM! A GREATER FOOL THAN I HAD EVEN IMAGINED THE GREATEST FOOL IN ALL THE WORLD!
AND THE TIME HAS COME FOR YOU TO PAY FOR YOUR FOLLY!

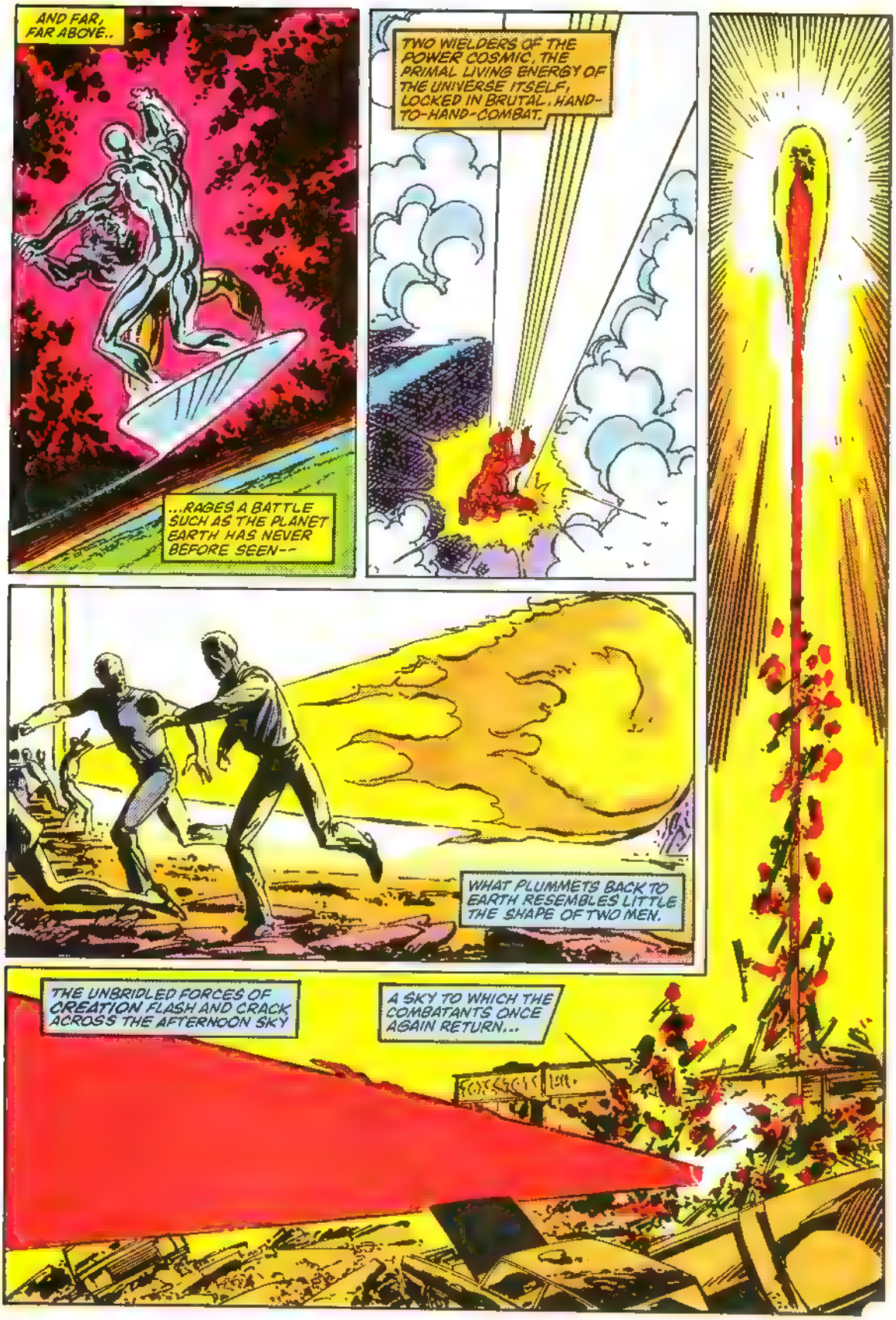
DOOM'S IN ON THIS TOO? WHAT'S THIS NATIONAL TROUP THE FF WEEK?
THIS WHOLE ATTACK WAS DOOM'S PLAN BEN HE'S THE ONE WHO BROUGHT THE VIRUS BACK!
YEAH? WELL THEM TWO DON'T LOOM NONE TOO BUDDY-BUDDY TA ME!
INDEED, DOOM IS UNLEASHING THE FULL MIGHT OF HIS ARMORED BATTLE SUIT AGAINST HIS ERSTWHILE "PARTNER".
IGNORANT ALIEN SAVAGE! I AM DOOM! THIS IS MY PLAN! MY VICTORY! WITHOUT THE DEGRADATION OF REED RICHARDS IT WOULD MEAN NOTHING!
UNFH!
NO, DOOM, THIS BATTLE DOES NOT BELONG TO YOU. THIS TRIUMPH IS NOT YOURS TO TAKE OR LEAVE AT WILL. THE FANTASTIC FOUR BETRAYED ME!
THEIR LIVES ARE MINE TO GRIND AWAY TO DUST!
MINE!
YEARRGH!

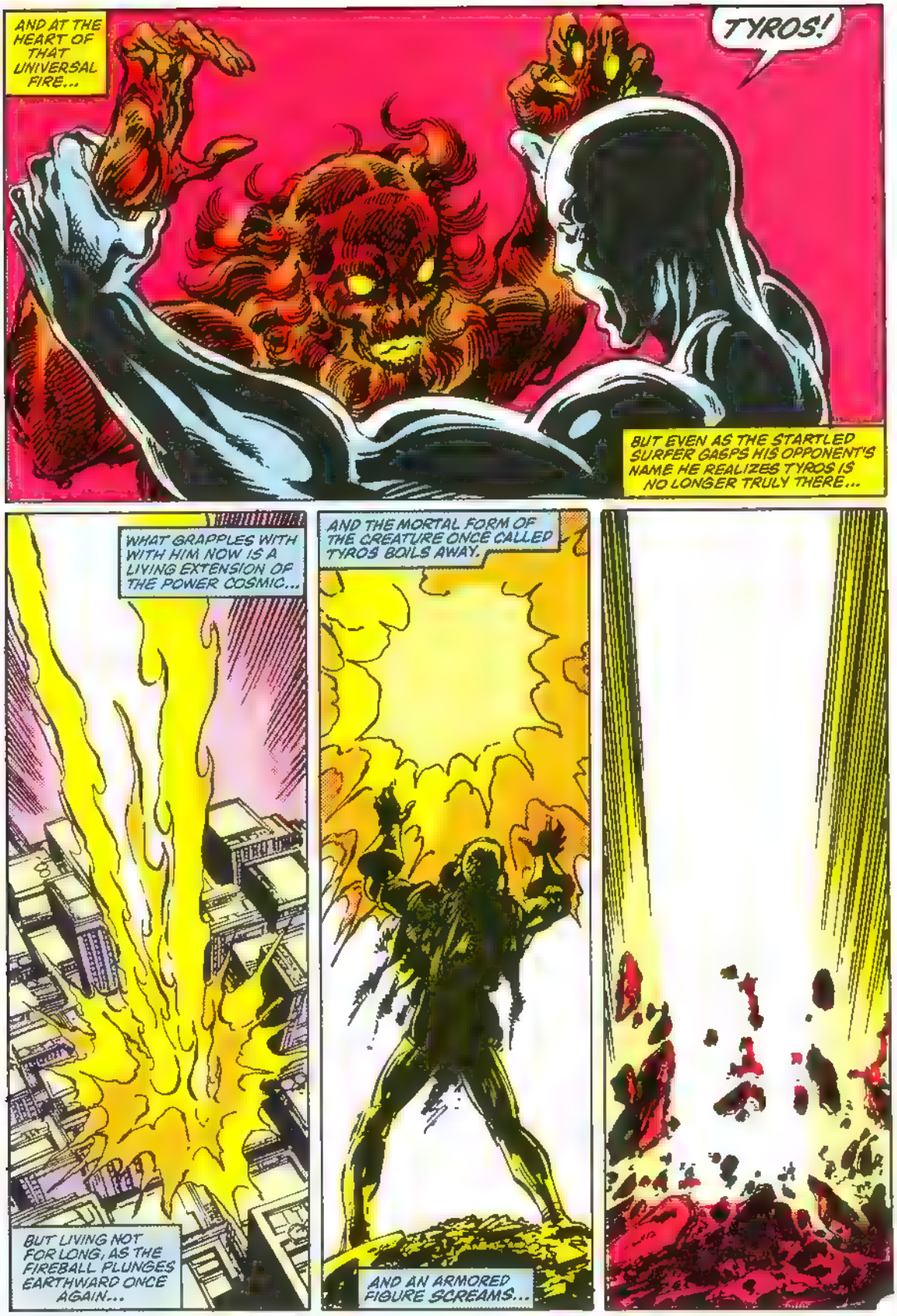
HA HA HA HA! YOU ARE FINISHED, DOOM! THE POWER COSMIC HAS FUSED YOUR ARMOR, AND THUS SHALL YOU REMAIN, A MOMENT TO YOUR OWN STUPIDITY, UNTIL IT PLEASES ME TO GRANT YOU THE RELEASE OF DEATH!
AND NOW SHALL I FINISH WITH THE FANTASTIC FOUR, FOR THERE REMAINS NO ONE IN ALL THE WORLD WHO CAN STOP ME!
NO ONE, FELLOW HERALD?
THEN "NO ONE" RIDES A SHINING SILVER BOARD!
THE AIR SCREAMS ABOUT HIS ARGENT FORM, AS HE FLASHES DOWN FROM THE VERY EDGE OF SPACE.
TO THE UNHUMAN EYES OF TYROS THE POWER COSMIC FAIRLY BRISTLES AROUND HIM, AND THE WOULD-BE DESTROYER FEELS A SINGLE DROP OF ACID FEAR SPLASH AGAINST HIS HEART.
THE SILVER SURFER!


AYE, TYROS, AND KNOW YOU THAT TO ATTACK THOSE THE SURFER NAMES AS *FRIENDS* IS TO ATTACK THE SURFER HIMSELF!
AND TO ATTACK THE SURFER IS FATUITY INDEED!
ARGH!!
I KNOW YOU HAVE BOASTED YOURSELF TO BE THE MOST POWERFUL HERALD OF OUR FORMER MASTER, TYROS...
... LET US NOW PUT THAT BOAST TO THE *TEST*!
THOUGH I FEAR FOR *YOU* IT WILL BE A TEST UNTO *DESTRUCTION*!


YOU ARE POWERFUL INDEED, NORRIN RADD! MORE POWERFUL PERHAPS THAN I HAD EVER SUSPECTED!
BUT I DO NOT BOAST TO SAY I AM MOST POWERFUL OF THE HERALDS OF GALACTUS!
FOR THAT IS WHAT I AM!
RACING ACROSS THE SHATTERED PARKING LOT TYROS SNATCHES UP A MOST PRECIOUS PRIZE...
NOW I HAVE IT: I HAVE BUT TO LEARN THE SECRET OF ITS FLIGHT AND THE STARS WILL ONCE AGAIN BE MINE!
BUT...
DAGRIM'S BONES!
IT LEAPS SKYWARD OF ITS OWN VOLITION!
NO, TYROS OF LANLAK. THE SILVER BOARD DOES NO MORE THAN WHAT IT IS COMMANDED TO DO SO BY ITS ONE TRUE MASTER!
SUCH IS THE WILL OF GALACTUS!

AND, AS THE BATTLE CLIMBS ONCE AGAIN TOWARDS THE CLOUDS...
THIS IS A CONTINGENCY I HAD NOT CALCULATED.
IT WAS STUPID OF ME TO CONFRONT TYROS MYSELF, INSTEAD OF USING A ROBOT.
NOW, WITH MY ARMOR FUSED, I AM UNABLE TO ACTIVATE MY ESCAPE MECHANISMS.
BUT I CANNOT SIMPLY STAND HERE. EVEN IN THIS CONDITION DOCTOR DOOM IS NOT HELPLESS.
THERE MUST BE A WAY TO EXTRICATE MYSELF FROM THIS PREDICAMENT.
AND THERE IS! BUT IT IS SOMETHING I HAVE NOT ATTEMPTED FOR MANY YEARS.
THE CONDITIONS ARE FAR FROM IDEAL, BUT IT IS MY ONE CHANCE! I MUST ATTEMPT IT!
AND AS VICTOR VON DOOM TURNS HIS AWESOME INTELLECT ALONG STRANGE PATHS...
WHY IS IT TAKING THE FANTASTIC FOUR SO LONG TO STOP THESE AWFUL PEOPLE? FROM ALL I'VE READ I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THEY WERE POWERFUL ENOUGH...
WHY, THEY'VE BEATEN THAT NASTY DOCTOR DOOM DOZENS OF TIMES BEFORE. I...
BE SILENT, OLD WOMAN! I HAVE NO TIME TO LISTEN TO YOUR RIDICULOUS PRATTLING!*
* YES, INCREDIBLY, DOOM ACTUALLY SWITCHED MINDS WITH THIS HAPLESS BYSTANDER... BUT THAT WAS A TALE FOR ANOTHER TIME...
HEY, DOWNER! WHAT SET HIM OFF, GRANNY?
I DONT THINK ANYTHING "SET HIM OFF." I THINK IT'S JUST ANOTHER SIGN OF THE AWFUL MANNERS YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE NOWADAYS!
IF MY NEPHEW WERE HERE, HE'D GIVE HIM A PIECE OF HIS MIND!
AND I AM NOT YOUR GRANNY!

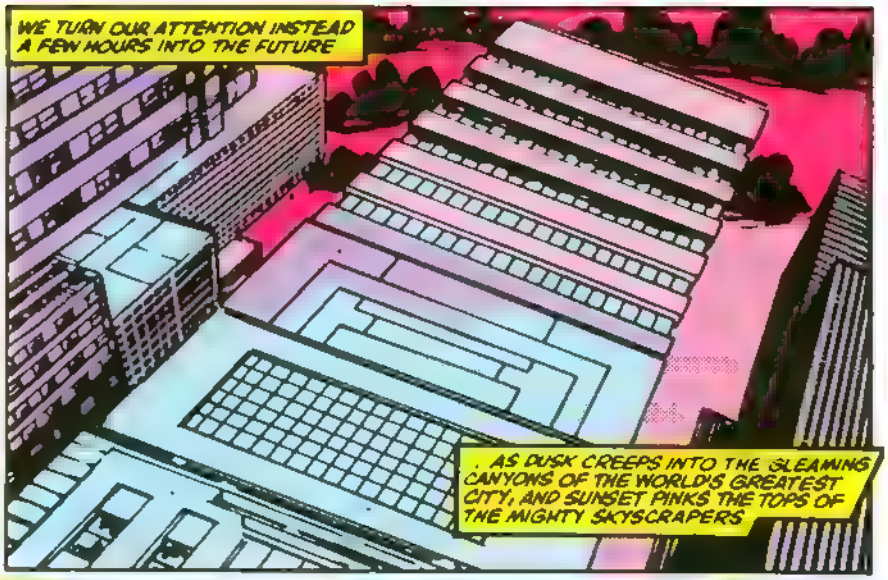

AND FAR, FAR ABOVE..
...RAGES A BATTLE SUCH AS THE PLANET EARTH HAS NEVER BEFORE SEEN--
TWO WIELDERS OF THE POWER COSMIC, THE PRIMAL LIVING ENERGY OF THE UNIVERSE ITSELF, LOCKED IN BRUTAL, HAND-TO-HAND-COMBAT.
WHAT PLUMMETS BACK TO EARTH RESEMBLES LITTLE THE SHAPE OF TWO MEN.
THE UNBRIDLED FORCES OF CREATION FLASH AND CRACK ACROSS THE AFTERNOON SKY
A SKY TO WHICH THE COMBATANTS ONCE AGAIN RETURN...

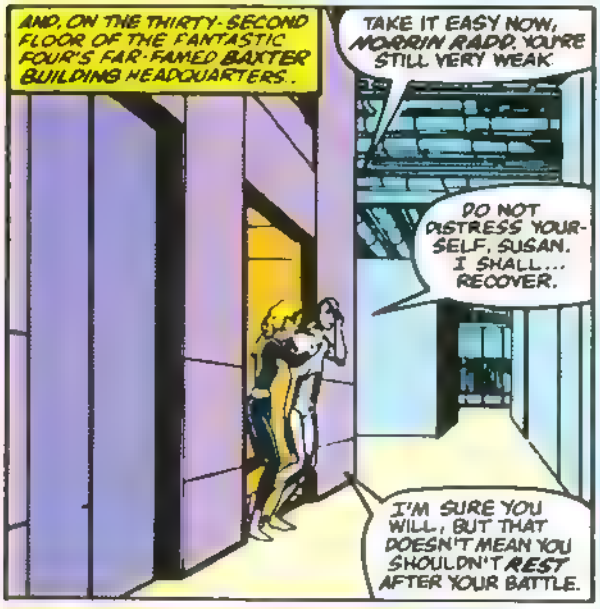

AND AT THE HEART OF THAT UNIVERSAL FIRE...
TYROS!
BUT EVEN AS THE STARTLED SURFER GASPS HIS OPPONENT'S NAME HE REALIZES TYROS IS NO LONGER TRULY THERE...
WHAT GRAPPLES WITH WITH HIM NOW IS A LIVING EXTENSION OF THE POWER COSMIC...
BUT LIVING NOT FOR LONG, AS THE FIREBALL PLUNGES EARTHWARD ONCE AGAIN...
AND THE MORTAL FORM OF THE CREATURE ONCE CALLED TYROS BOILS AWAY.
AND AN ARMORED FIGURE SCREAMS...

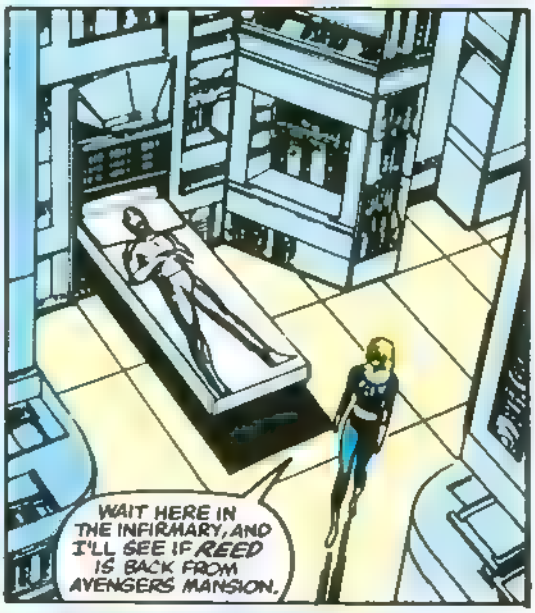
HOLY CATS! I AIN'T NEVER SEEN AN EXPLOSION LIKE THIS BEFORE.
IT'S LIKE IT'S ALMOST ALIVE!
GET CLEAR, BOTH OF YOU!
I'VE SURROUNDED IT WITH AN INVISIBLE FORCE FIELD, BUT IT'S SO POWERFUL...
PUSHING ME BACK...
SIS...?
SUZIE!
PROPELLED BY THE PRESSURE OF THE BLAST AGAINST HER FORCE-FIELD, SUSAN STORM RICHARDS FAIRLY FLIES ACROSS THE PARKING LOT.
EVEN TAKEN THUS BY SURPRISE, HER LITHE FORM IS GRACEFUL IN MOTION.
THE SAME CANNOT BE SAID FOR HER STOPPING...
SIS! SIS, ARE YOU OKAY?
THE BABY...?
WE'RE FINE, JOHNNY.
BUT...
...WHAT ABOUT THE SILVER SURFER?

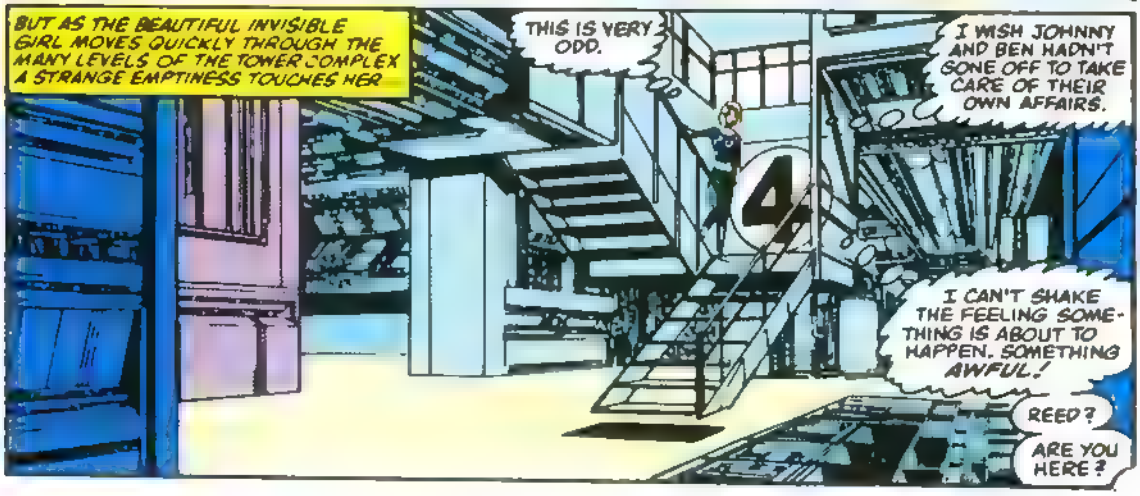
I DUNNO, SUE. IT DON'T LOOK LIKE ANYBODY'S COMIN' UP OUTTA THIS MESS...
WAIT A SEC...
STRUGGLING, STRAINING, THE BATTERED FIGURE RISES FROM THE BUBBLING CAULDRON.
IT... WOULD SEEM... I HAVE ...WON...
WOW, GLINTY, AM I EVER GLAD TA SEE YOU ALL IN ONE PIECE. BUT, TYROS...?
AN' DOOM?!
OF DOOM I CANNOT SAY. BUT TYROS IS GONE, ULTIMATELY CONSUMED BY THE POWER COSMIC.
AND AS FOR DOCTOR DOOM...
SIS, BE CAREFUL!
DON'T WORRY, JOHNNY I DON'T THINK I HAVE ANYTHING TO FEAR FROM DOOM ANYMORE!
I DON'T THINK ANY OF US NEED FEAR HIM EVER AGAIN!
DOOM'S MASK! THE BLAST MUST HAVE BLOWN IT RIGHT OFF!
AND IF THE BLAST COULD SHATTER HIS ARMOR THEN .. DOOM COULD NOT HAVE SURVIVED. THE GREATEST EVIL THE WORLD HAS EVER FACED IS... DEAD!
AN' GOOD RIDDANCE, SEZ I. LET'S BLOW THIS JOINT!

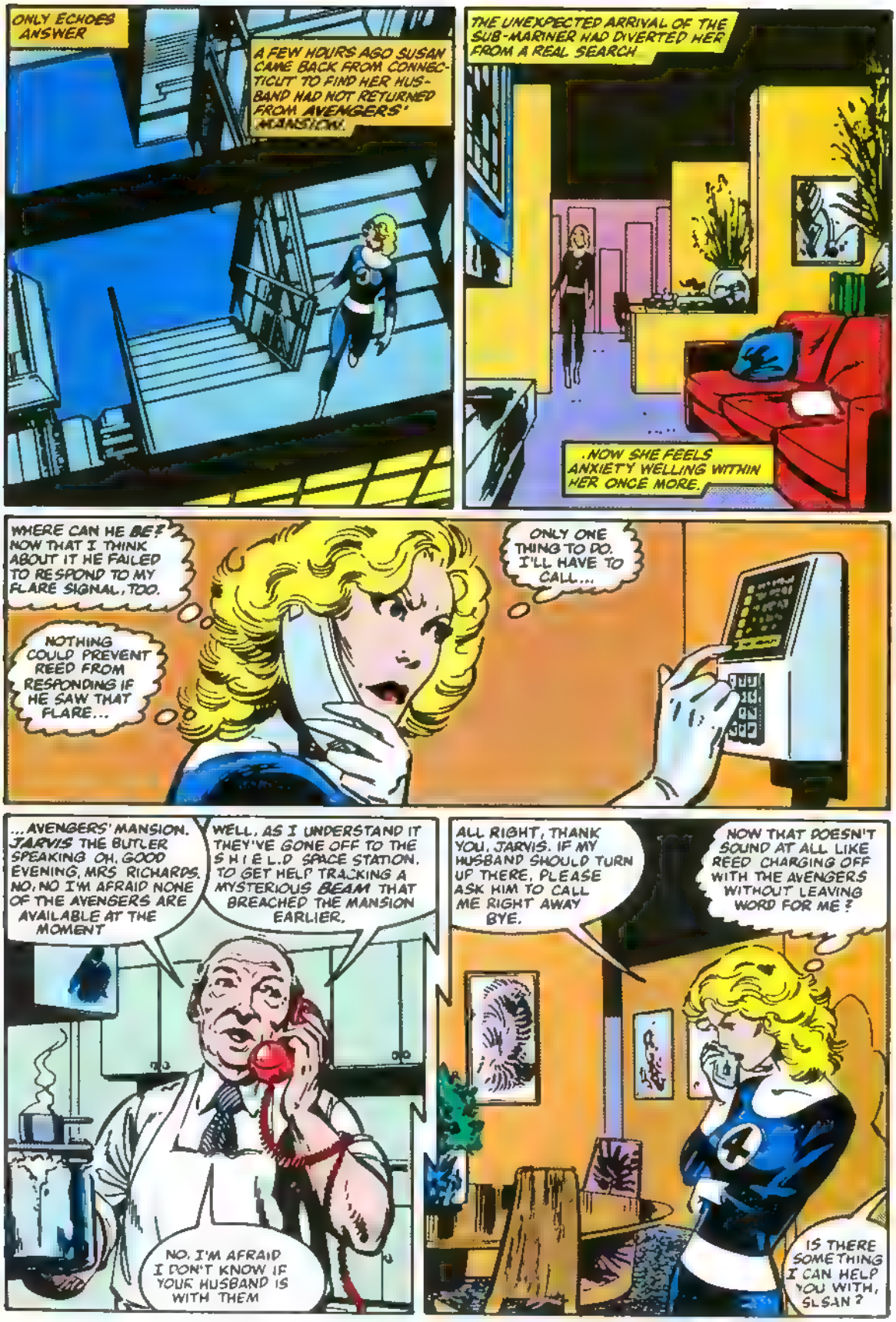
LEAVING WILL NOT PROVE QUITE SO EASY. THE CONSEQUENCES OF A MAJOR BATTLE IN THE MIDDLE OF A HIGHLY POPULATED AREA BEING MANY. THERE ARE ACCOUNTS BOTH ECONOMIC AND EMOTIONAL THAT WILL TAKE YEARS TO SETTLE. WE NEED NOT CONCERN OURSELVES WITH SUCH MATTERS FOR THE PRESENT, HOWEVER.

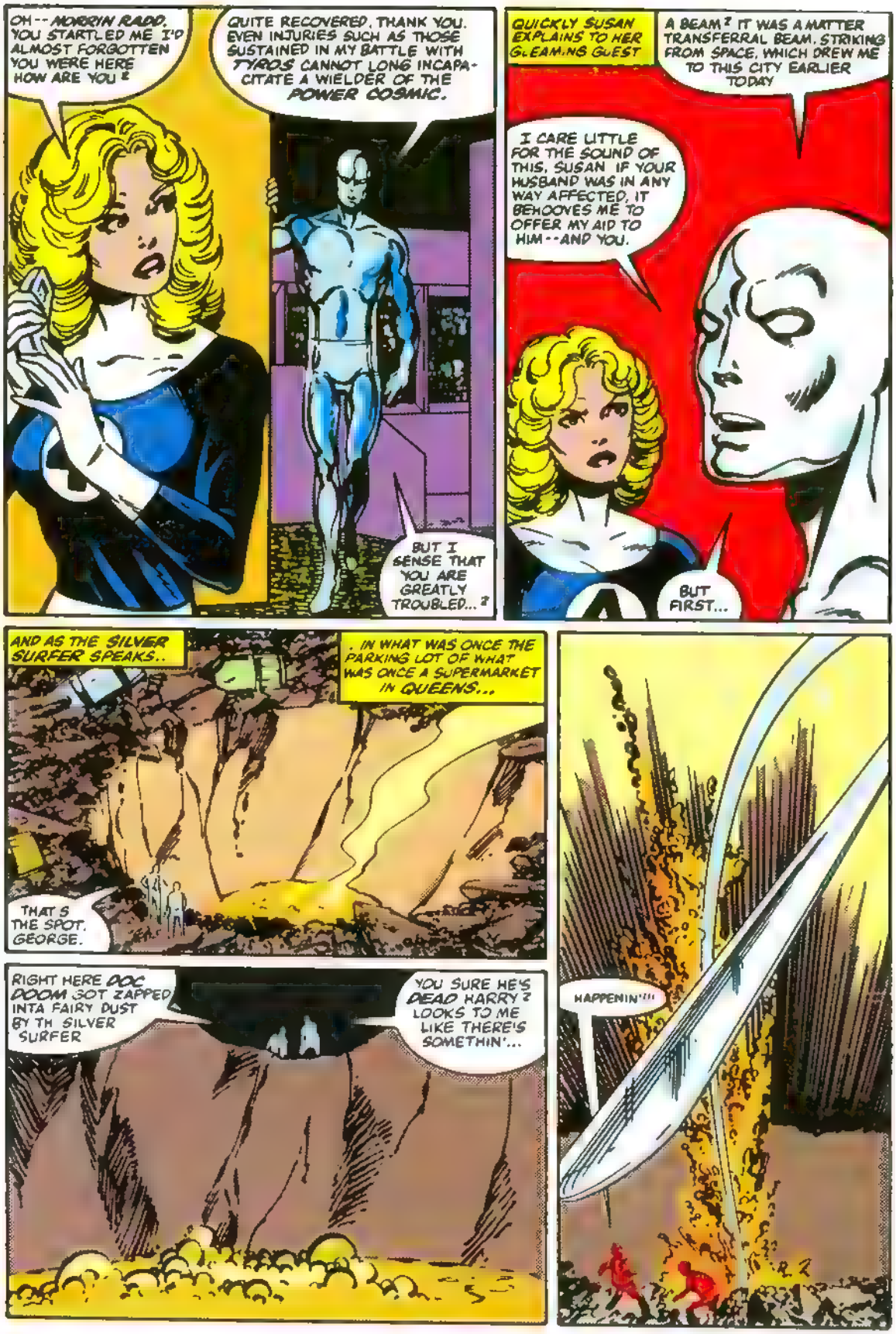

WE TURN OUR ATTENTION INSTEAD A FEW HOURS INTO THE FUTURE
. . AS DUSK CREEPS INTO THE GLEAMING CANYONS OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST CITY, AND SUNSET PINKS THE TOPS OF THE MIGHTY SKYSCRAPERS

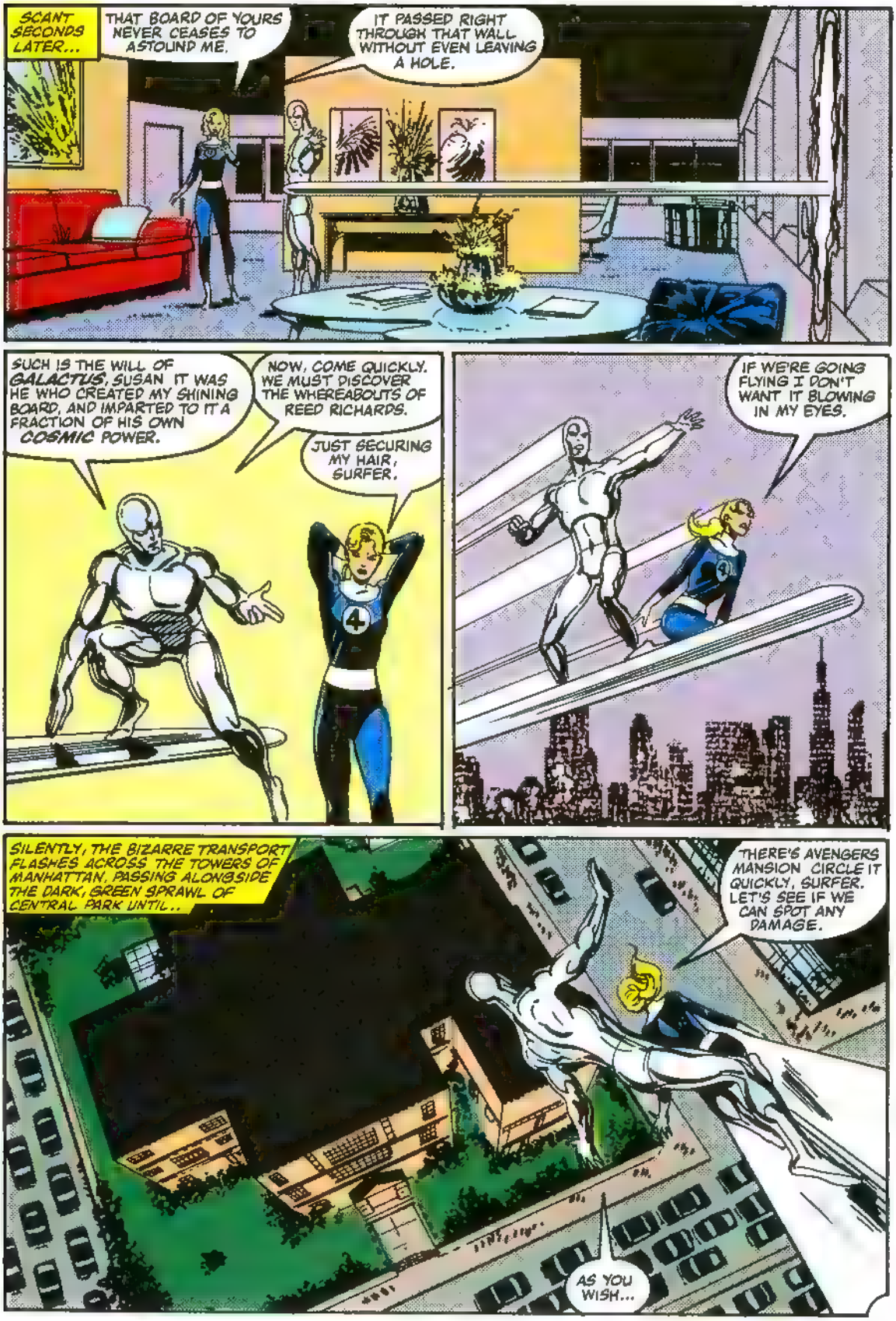

AND, ON THE THIRTY-SECOND FLOOR OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S FAR-FAMED BAXTER BUILDING HEADQUARTERS . .
TAKE IT EASY NOW, MORRIN RADD. YOU'RE STILL VERY WEAK.
DO NOT DISTRESS YOURSELF, SUSAN. I SHALL... RECOVER.
I'M SURE YOU WILL, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU SHOULDN'T REST AFTER YOUR BATTLE.

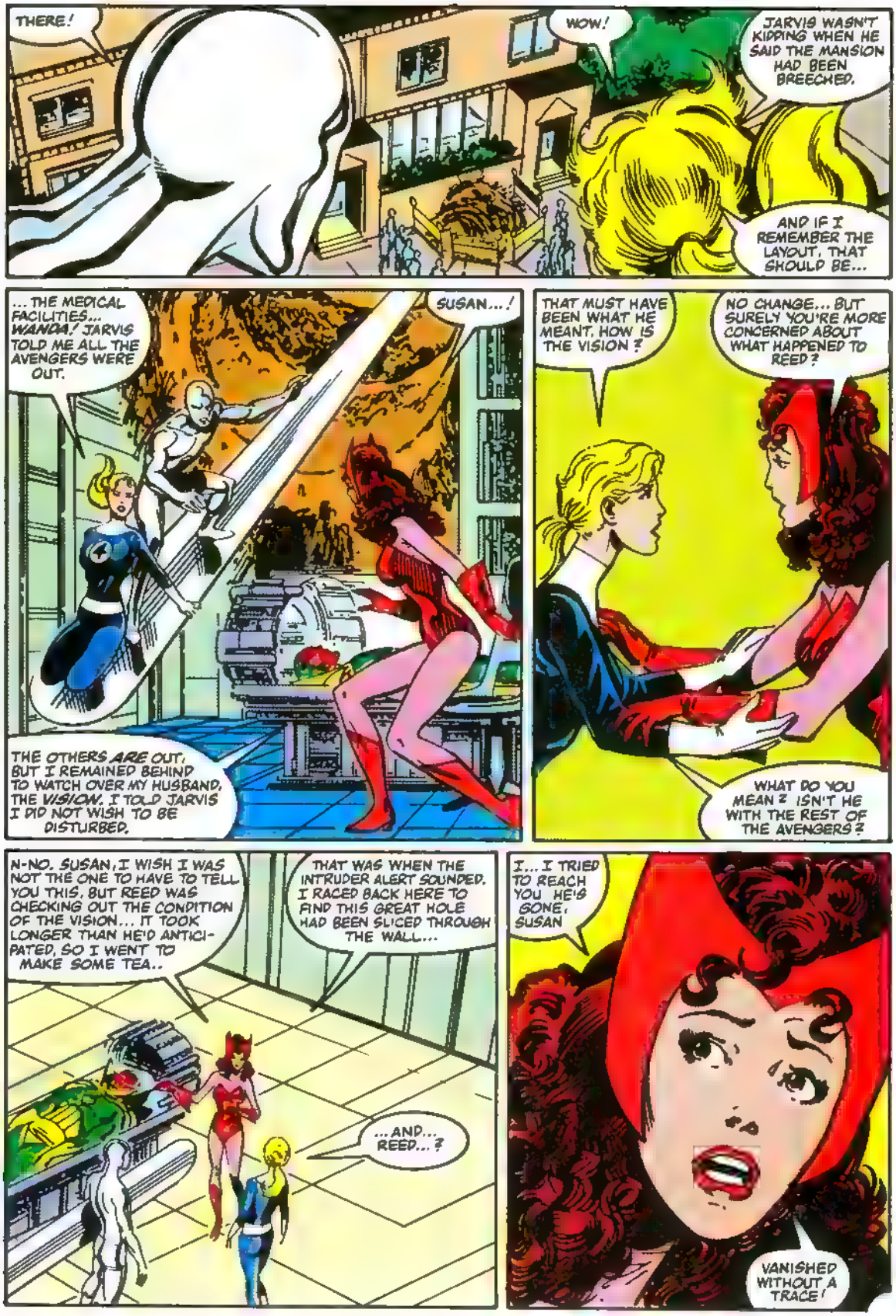


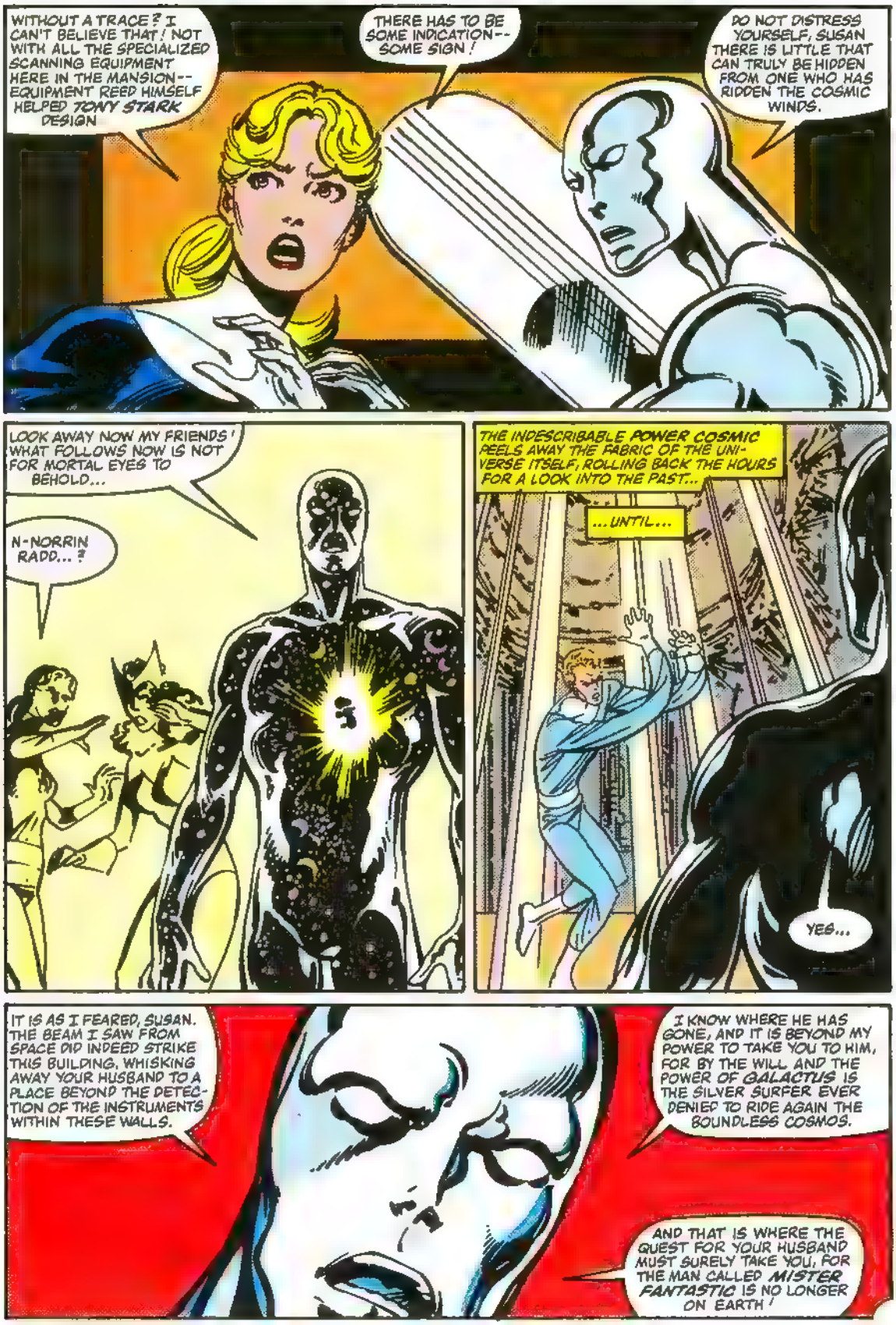

BUT AS THE BEAUTIFUL INVISIBLE GIRL MOVES QUICKLY THROUGH THE MANY LEVELS OF THE TOWER COMPLEX A STRANGE EMPTINESS TOUCHES HER
THIS IS VERY ODD.
I WISH JOHNNY AND BEN HADN'T GONE OFF TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN AFFAIRS.
I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING SOMETHING IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN. SOMETHING AWFUL!
REED?
ARE YOU HERE?

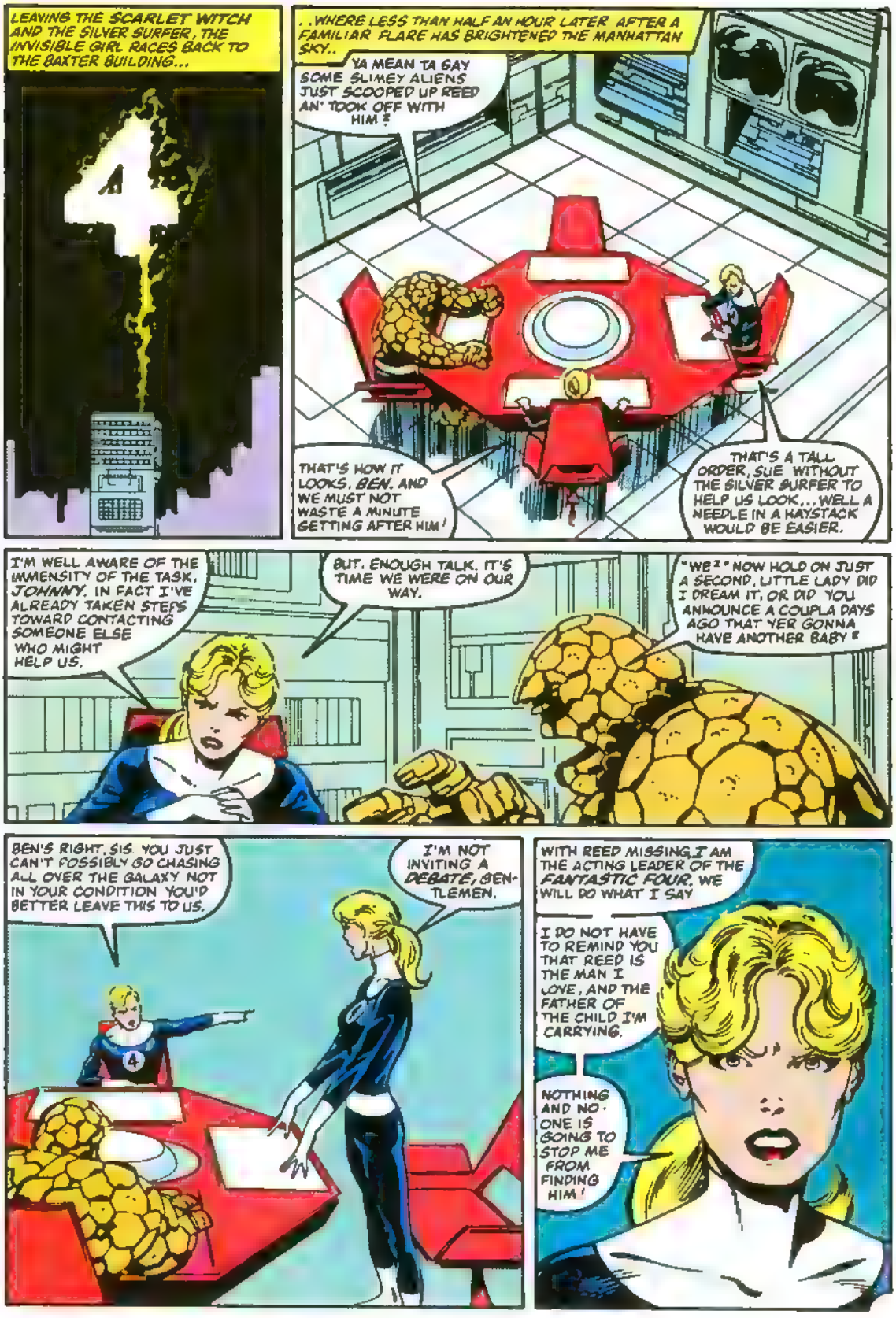

ONLY ECHOES ANSWER
A FEW HOURS AGO SUSAN CAME BACK FROM CONNECTICUT TO FIND HER HUSBAND HAD NOT RETURNED FROM AVENGERS' MANSION.
THE UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL OF THE SUB-MARINER HAD DIVERTED HER FROM A REAL SEARCH
.NOW SHE FEELS ANXIETY WELLING WITHIN HER ONCE MORE.
WHERE CAN HE BE? NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT HE FAILED TO RESPOND TO MY FLARE SIGNAL, TOO.
NOTHING COULD PREVENT REED FROM RESPONDING IF HE SAW THAT FLARE...
ONLY ONE THING TO DO. I'LL HAVE TO CALL...
...AVENGERS' MANSION. JARVIS THE BUTLER SPEAKING. OH, GOOD EVENING, MRS. RICHARDS. NO, NO I'M AFRAID NONE OF THE AVENGERS ARE AVAILABLE AT THE MOMENT
WELL, AS I UNDERSTAND IT THEY'VE GONE OFF TO THE S.H.I.E.L.D. SPACE STATION, TO GET HELP TRACKING A MYSTERIOUS BEAM THAT BREACHED THE MANSION EARLIER.
NO, I'M AFRAID I DON'T KNOW IF YOUR HUSBAND IS WITH THEM
ALL RIGHT, THANK YOU, JARVIS. IF MY HUSBAND SHOULD TURN UP THERE, PLEASE ASK HIM TO CALL ME RIGHT AWAY BYE.
NOW THAT DOESN'T SOUND AT ALL LIKE REED CHARGING OFF WITH THE AVENGERS WITHOUT LEAVING WORD FOR ME?
IS THERE SOMETHING I CAN HELP YOU WITH, SUSAN?


OH--MORRIN RADD, YOU STARTLED ME! I'D ALMOST FORGOTTEN YOU WERE HERE. HOW ARE YOU?
QUITE RECOVERED, THANK YOU. EVEN INJURIES SUCH AS THOSE SUSTAINED IN MY BATTLE WITH TYROS CANNOT LONG INCAPACITATE A WIELDER OF THE POWER COSMIC.
BUT I SENSE THAT YOU ARE GREATLY TROUBLED...?
QUICKLY SUSAN EXPLAINS TO HER GLEAMING GUEST
A BEAM? IT WAS A MATTER TRANSFERRAL BEAM, STRIKING FROM SPACE, WHICH DREW ME TO THIS CITY EARLIER TODAY
I CARE LITTLE FOR THE SOUND OF THIS, SUSAN. IF YOUR HUSBAND WAS IN ANY WAY AFFECTED, IT BEHOOVES ME TO OFFER MY AID TO HIM--AND YOU.
BUT FIRST...
AND AS THE SILVER SURFER SPEAKS..
...IN WHAT WAS ONCE THE PARKING LOT OF WHAT WAS ONCE A SUPERMARKET IN QUEENS...
THAT'S THE SPOT, GEORGE.
RIGHT HERE DOC DOOM GOT ZAPPED INTA FAIRY DUST BY TH SILVER SURFER
YOU SURE HE'S DEAD HARRY? LOOKS TO ME LIKE THERE'S SOMETHIN'...
HAPPENIN'!!!

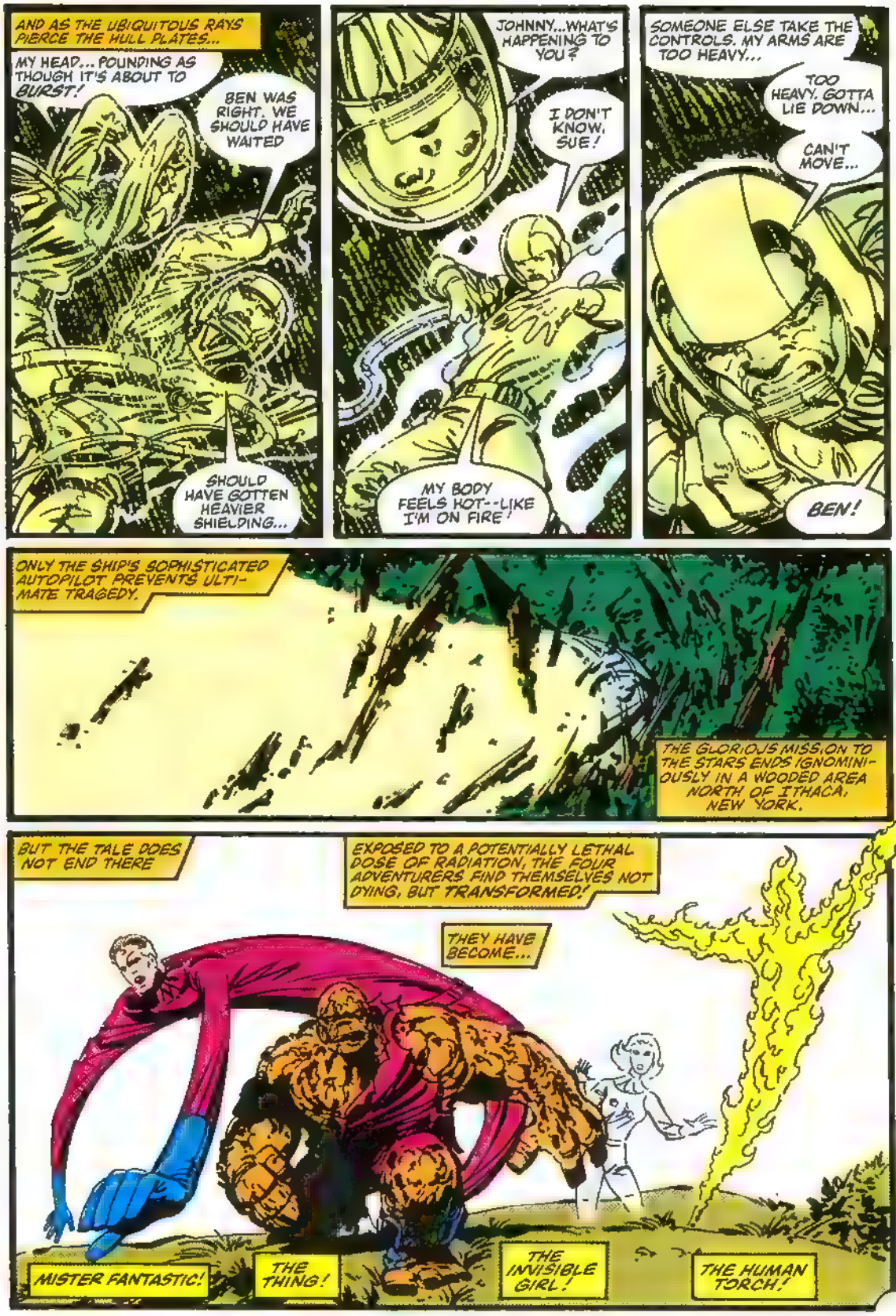

SCANT SECONDS LATER...
THAT BOARD OF YOURS NEVER CEASES TO ASTOUND ME.
IT PASSED RIGHT THROUGH THAT WALL WITHOUT EVEN LEAVING A HOLE.
SUCH IS THE WILL OF GALACTUS, SUSAN. IT WAS HE WHO CREATED MY SHINING BOARD, AND IMPARTED TO IT A FRACTION OF HIS OWN COSMIC POWER.
NOW, COME QUICKLY. WE MUST DISCOVER THE WHEREABOUTS OF REED RICHARDS.
JUST SECURING MY HAIR, SURFER.
IF WE'RE GOING FLYING I DON'T WANT IT BLOWING IN MY EYES.
SILENTLY, THE BIZARRE TRANSPORT FLASHES ACROSS THE TOWERS OF MANHATTAN, PASSING ALONGSIDE THE DARK, GREEN SPRAWL OF CENTRAL PARK UNTIL...
THERE'S AVENGERS MANSION. CIRCLE IT QUICKLY, SURFER. LET'S SEE IF WE CAN SPOT ANY DAMAGE.
AS YOU WISH...

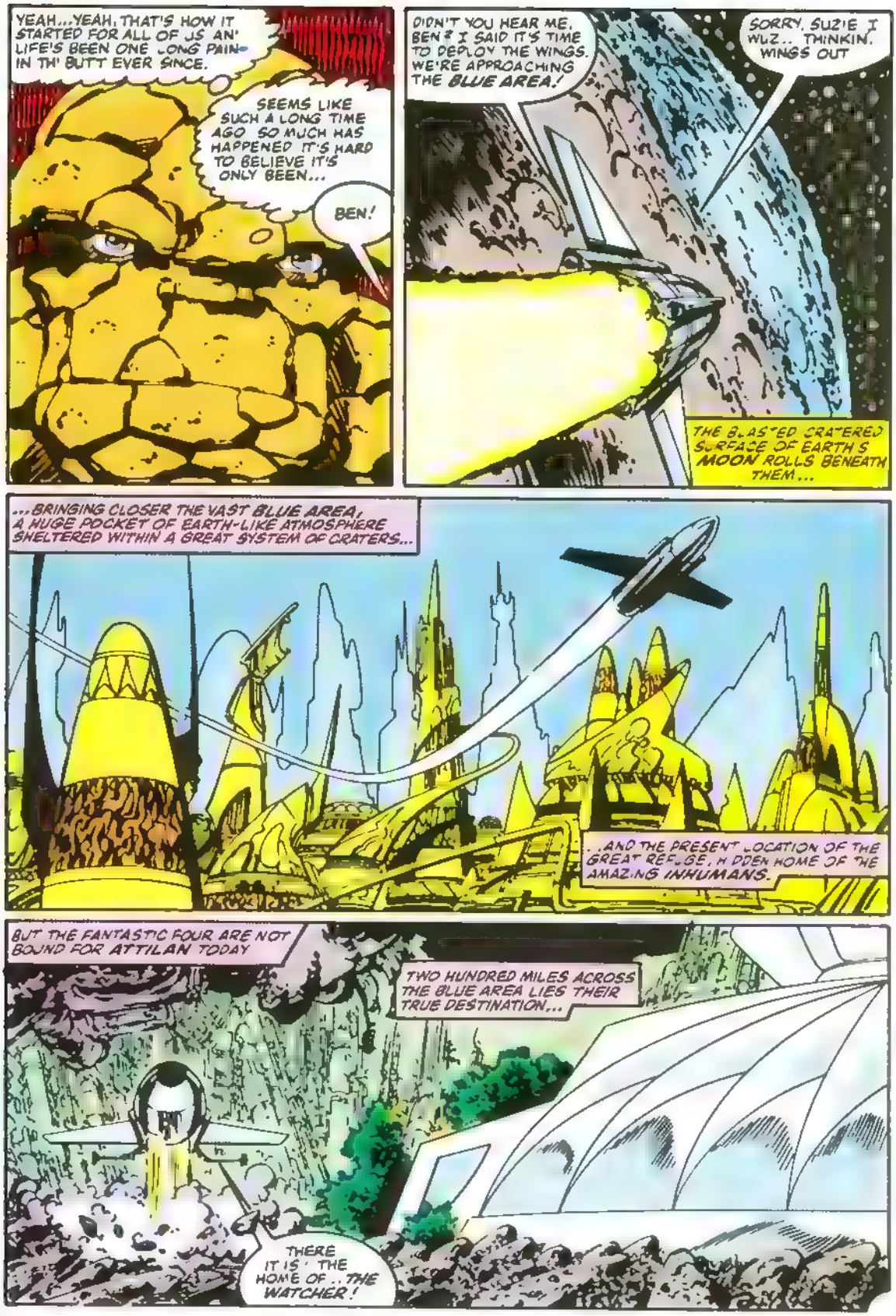

THERE!
WOW!
JARVIS WASN'T KIDDING WHEN HE SAID THE MANSION HAD BEEN BREECHED.
AND IF I REMEMBER THE LAYOUT, THAT SHOULD BE...
...THE MEDICAL FACILITIES... WANDA! JARVIS TOLD ME ALL THE AVENGERS WERE OUT.
SUSAN...!
THE OTHERS ARE OUT, BUT I REMAINED BEHIND TO WATCH OVER MY HUSBAND, THE VISION. I TOLD JARVIS I DID NOT WISH TO BE DISTURBED.
THAT MUST HAVE BEEN WHAT HE MEANT. HOW IS THE VISION?
NO CHANGE... BUT SURELY YOU'RE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO REED?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? ISN'T HE WITH THE REST OF THE AVENGERS?
N-NO, SUSAN. I WISH I WAS NOT THE ONE TO HAVE TO TELL YOU THIS, BUT REED WAS CHECKING OUT THE CONDITION OF THE VISION... IT TOOK LONGER THAN HE'D ANTICIPATED, SO I WENT TO MAKE SOME TEA..
THAT WAS WHEN THE INTRUDER ALERT SOUNDED. I RACED BACK HERE TO FIND THIS GREAT HOLE HAD BEEN SLICED THROUGH THE WALL...
...AND... REED...?
I... I TRIED TO REACH YOU. HE'S GONE, SUSAN
VANISHED WITHOUT A TRACE!


WITHOUT A TRACE? I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT! NOT WITH ALL THE SPECIALIZED SCANNING EQUIPMENT HERE IN THE MANSION--EQUIPMENT REED HIMSELF HELPED TONY STARK DESIGN
THERE HAS TO BE SOME INDICATION--SOME SIGN!
DO NOT DISTRESS YOURSELF, SUSAN THERE IS LITTLE THAT CAN TRULY BE HIDDEN FROM ONE WHO HAS RIDDEN THE COSMIC WINDS.
LOOK AWAY NOW MY FRIENDS! WHAT FOLLOWS NOW IS NOT FOR MORTAL EYES TO BEHOLD...
N-NORRIN RADD...?
THE INDESCRIBABLE POWER COSMIC PEELS AWAY THE FABRIC OF THE UNIVERSE ITSELF, ROLLING BACK THE HOURS FOR A LOOK INTO THE PAST...
...UNTIL...
YES...
IT IS AS I FEARED, SUSAN. THE BEAM I SAW FROM SPACE DID INDEED STRIKE THIS BUILDING, WHISKING AWAY YOUR HUSBAND TO A PLACE BEYOND THE DETECTION OF THE INSTRUMENTS WITHIN THESE WALLS.
I KNOW WHERE HE HAS GONE, AND IT IS BEYOND MY POWER TO TAKE YOU TO HIM, FOR BY THE WILL AND THE POWER OF GALACTUS IS THE SILVER SURFER EVER DENIED TO RIDE AGAIN THE BOUNDLESS COSMOS.
AND THAT IS WHERE THE QUEST FOR YOUR HUSBAND MUST SURELY TAKE YOU, FOR THE MAN CALLED MISTER FANTASTIC IS NO LONGER ON EARTH!

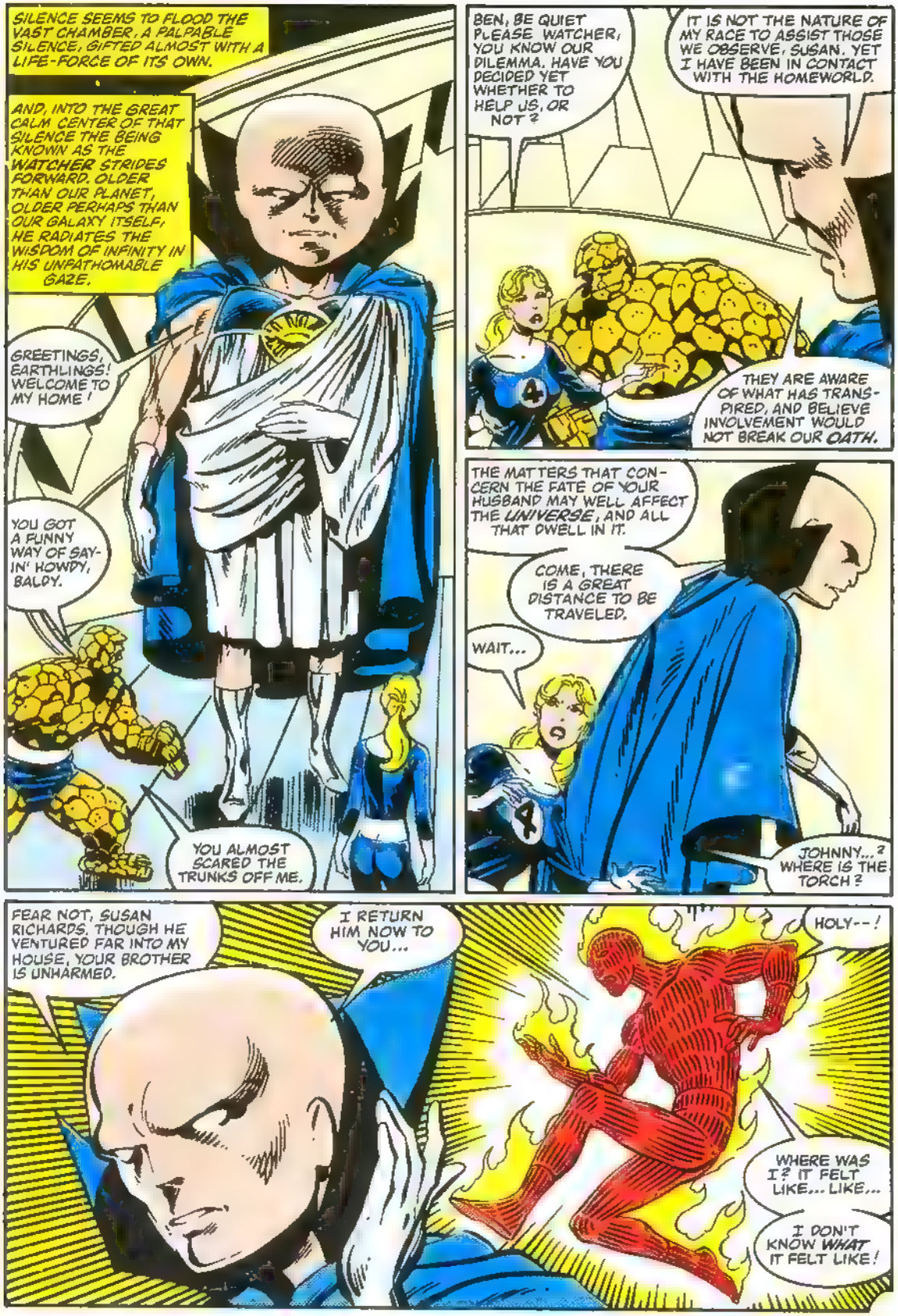

LEAVING THE SCARLET WITCH AND THE SILVER SURFER, THE INVISIBLE GIRL RACES BACK TO THE BAXTER BUILDING...
4
..WHERE LESS THAN HALF AN HOUR LATER AFTER A FAMILIAR FLARE HAS BRIGHTENED THE MANHATTAN SKY..
YA MEAN TA SAY SOME SLIMEY ALIENS JUST SCOOPED UP REED AN' TOOK OFF WITH HIM?
THAT'S HOW IT LOOKS, BEN. AND WE MUST NOT WASTE A MINUTE GETTING AFTER HIM!
THAT'S A TALL ORDER, SUE WITHOUT THE SILVER SURFER TO HELP US LOOK... WELL A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK WOULD BE EASIER.
I'M WELL AWARE OF THE IMMENSITY OF THE TASK, JOHNNY. IN FACT I'VE ALREADY TAKEN STEPS TOWARD CONTACTING SOMEONE ELSE WHO MIGHT HELP US.
BUT, ENOUGH TALK. IT'S TIME WE WERE ON OUR WAY.
"WE?" NOW HOLD ON JUST A SECOND, LITTLE LADY DID I DREAM IT, OR DID YOU ANNOUNCE A COUPLA DAYS AGO THAT YER GONNA HAVE ANOTHER BABY?
BEN'S RIGHT, SIS. YOU JUST CAN'T POSSIBLY GO CHASING ALL OVER THE GALAXY NOT IN YOUR CONDITION. YOU'D BETTER LEAVE THIS TO US.
I'M NOT INVITING A DEBATE, GENTLEMEN.
WITH REED MISSING, I AM THE ACTING LEADER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR. WE WILL DO WHAT I SAY
I DO NOT HAVE TO REMIND YOU THAT REED IS THE MAN I LOVE, AND THE FATHER OF THE CHILD I'M CARRYING.
NOTHING AND NO-ONE IS GOING TO STOP ME FROM FINDING HIM!

MINUTES LATER, SPECIAL BAFFLES DAMPEN THE ROAR OF ROCKET ENGINES AS A UNIQUE SPACECRAFT LEAPS FROM ITS SILO ATOP THE BAXTER BUILDING.
ZERO PLUS TWENTY-EIGHT SECONDS. ALL SYSTEMS NOMINAL.
WAY AHEAD OF YA, SUZIE. OUT OF ATMOSPHERE IN TWELVE SECONDS...
BEN, STAND BY TO ACTIVATE SECONDARY THRUSTERS.
...AN' INTA THE COSMIC RAY BELT AGAIN...
UNBIDDEN, THE MIND OF BEN GRIMM TURNS BACK, TO ANOTHER ROCKET, ANOTHER LAUNCH...
PRIMARY CIRCUITS AT MAXIMUM FUNCTION. ALL SYSTEMS SHOW GREEN FOR FIRST STAGE JETTISON.
YEAH, EXCEPT FOR THE COSMIC RAYS. NO ONE KNOWS WHAT THEY'LL DO.
SHE'S BEHAVING LIKE A BABY EVERY-THING IS PERFECT.
FOUR PEOPLE, FOUR FRIENDS, EMBARKING ON A BOLD VENTURE INTO THE UNKNOWN, REACHING FOR THE STARS, GUESSING NOT AT ALL WHAT FATE TRULY HELD IN STORE FOR THEM...
FFFFF
WE'RE ENTERING THE COSMIC STORM AREA! HANG ON!
HEAR THAT? IT'S THE COSMIC RAYS! THEY'RE PENETRATING THE SHIP!


AND AS THE UBIQUITOUS RAYS PIERCE THE HULL PLATES...
MY HEAD... POUNDING AS THOUGH IT'S ABOUT TO BURST!
BEN WAS RIGHT. WE SHOULD HAVE WAITED
SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN HEAVIER SHIELDING...
JOHNNY...WHAT'S HAPPENING TO YOU?
I DON'T KNOW, SUE!
MY BODY FEELS HOT--LIKE I'M ON FIRE!
SOMEONE ELSE TAKE THE CONTROLS. MY ARMS ARE TOO HEAVY...
TOO HEAVY. GOTTA LIE DOWN...
CAN'T MOVE...
BEN!
ONLY THE SHIP'S SOPHISTICATED AUTOPILOT PREVENTS ULTIMATE TRAGEDY.
THE GLORIOUS MISSION TO THE STARS ENDS IGNOMINIOUSLY IN A WOODED AREA NORTH OF ITHACA, NEW YORK.
BUT THE TALE DOES NOT END THERE
EXPOSED TO A POTENTIALLY LETHAL DOSE OF RADIATION, THE FOUR ADVENTURERS FIND THEMSELVES NOT DYING, BUT TRANSFORMED!
THEY HAVE BECOME...
MISTER FANTASTIC!
THE THING!
THE INVISIBLE GIRL!
THE HUMAN TORCH!


YEAH...YEAH, THAT'S HOW IT STARTED FOR ALL OF US AN' LIFE'S BEEN ONE LONG PAIN IN TH' BUTT EVER SINCE.
SEEMS LIKE SUCH A LONG TIME AGO SO MUCH HAS HAPPENED IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE IT'S ONLY BEEN...
BEN!
DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME, BEN? I SAID IT'S TIME TO DEPLOY THE WINGS. WE'RE APPROACHING THE BLUE AREA!
SORRY, SUZIE I WUZ... THINKIN'. WINGS OUT
THE BLASTED CRATERED SURFACE OF EARTH'S MOON ROLLS BENEATH THEM...
...BRINGING CLOSER THE VAST BLUE AREA, A HUGE POCKET OF EARTH-LIKE ATMOSPHERE SHELTERED WITHIN A GREAT SYSTEM OF CRATERS...
...AND THE PRESENT LOCATION OF THE GREAT REFUGE, HIDDEN HOME OF THE AMAZING INHUMANS.
BUT THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE NOT BOUND FOR ATTILAN TODAY
TWO HUNDRED MILES ACROSS THE BLUE AREA LIES THEIR TRUE DESTINATION...
THERE IT IS! THE HOME OF...THE WATCHER!

TH' WATCHER, HUH? YEAH, IF ANYONE CAN HELP US FIND YOUR HUBBINS, IT'S HIM. HE MAKES REED LOOK LIKE A KINDERGARTEN DROP-OUT.
BUT HOW DO WE GET INTO HIS HOUSE? I DON'T SEE ANY SIGN OF A DOOR...?
FOR SHAME, JOHNNY! HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN ALREADY? THE WAY TO ENTER...
...IS SIMPLY TO STEP THROUGH THE WALL!
MAN-O-MAN I'D FORGOTTEN HOW SPOOKY THIS PLACE IS. THE WHOLE HOUSE MAKES ME FEEL LIKE I LEFT MY 3-D GLASSES AT HOME...
REED SAYS THAT'S BECAUSE SO MUCH OF THE HOUSE ACTUALLY EXISTS OUTSIDE OUR CONVENTIONAL THREE DIMENSIONS.
YEAH, WELL IT'LL TAKE FOR-EVER TO FIND THE WATCHER ON FOOT. FLAME ON!
BUT.
HMM. SUDDENLY I DON'T THINK THIS WAS SUCH A GRAND IDEA AFTER ALL.
IT'S ONLY A COUPLE OF SECONDS SINCE I LEFT BEN AND SUE--BUT I'M NOT SURE I CAN FIND MY WAY BACK TO THEM...
BLAST! I WISH THE TORCH HADN'T FLOWN OFF LIKE THAT! I CONTACTED THE WATCHER BY SUB-ETHER WAVEBAND EARLIER, AND HE SAID HE'D BE HERE TO MEET US!
AND AS MY WORD IS G.VEN, SO IS IT KEPT, SUSAN RICHARDS.
EEP!


SILENCE SEEMS TO FLOOD THE VAST CHAMBER, A PALPABLE SILENCE, GIFTED ALMOST WITH A LIFE-FORCE OF ITS OWN.
AND, INTO THE GREAT CALM CENTER OF THAT SILENCE THE BEING KNOWN AS THE WATCHER STRIDES FORWARD. OLDER THAN OUR PLANET, OLDER PERHAPS THAN OUR GALAXY ITSELF, HE RADIATES THE WISDOM OF INFINITY IN HIS UNFATHOMABLE GAZE.
GREETINGS, EARTHLINGS! WELCOME TO MY HOME!
YOU GOT A FUNNY WAY OF SAYIN' HOWDY, BALDY.
YOU ALMOST SCARED THE TRUNKS OFF ME.
BEN, BE QUIET PLEASE. WATCHER, YOU KNOW OUR DILEMMA. HAVE YOU DECIDED YET WHETHER TO HELP US, OR NOT?
IT IS NOT THE NATURE OF MY RACE TO ASSIST THOSE WE OBSERVE, SUSAN. YET I HAVE BEEN IN CONTACT WITH THE HOMEWORLD.
THEY ARE AWARE OF WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED, AND BELIEVE INVOLVEMENT WOULD NOT BREAK OUR OATH.
THE MATTERS THAT CONCERN THE FATE OF YOUR HUSBAND MAY WELL AFFECT THE UNIVERSE, AND ALL THAT DWELL IN IT.
COME, THERE IS A GREAT DISTANCE TO BE TRAVELED.
WAIT...
JOHNNY...? WHERE IS THE TORCH?
FEAR NOT, SUSAN RICHARDS. THOUGH HE VENTURED FAR INTO MY HOUSE, YOUR BROTHER IS UNHARMED.
I RETURN HIM NOW TO YOU...
HOLY--!
WHERE WAS I? IT FELT LIKE... LIKE...
I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT FELT LIKE!

YOU HAVE NO WORDS, JOHN STORM, TO DESCRIBE THE INDESCRIBABLE. TO SAVE YOU FROM THE DANGERS OF MY HOUSE...
...I SIMPLY REMOVED YOU FROM IT...REMOVED YOU FOR A MOMENT FROM THIS VERY PLANE OF REALITY.
THAT'S FANCY TALK, WATCHER. BUT WHEN ARE WE GETTIN' GOIN'?
AS FOR THAT, BEN GRIMM...
...WE ARE ALREADY ON OUR WAY...
AROUND THEM THE UNIVERSE SEEMS TO FOLD IN UPON ITSELF.
TIME AND SPACE SEEM SUDDENLY MEANINGLESS, MERELY THE FRAGILE CONCEPTS OF SMALL MINDS STRIVING HOPELESSLY TO COMPREHEND THEIR PLACE IN INFINITY.
AND THEN...
WE ARE NEARLY THERE, MY FRIENDS. LOOK NOW...

AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE, THEY STRETCH, FILLING THE SKY, OVER-WHELMING THE MIND WITH THEIR SHEER NUMBERS

SOME ARE OLD, OLDER EVEN THAN MAN ON EARTH, SCARRED AND PITTED BY MILLIONS OF SPACE-FARING YEARS.

OTHERS ARE NEWER, GLEAMING SILVER SPINDLES, ALL SMOOTH LINES AND GRACEFUL CURVES, NOT YET MARRED BY THE ENDLESS STREAM OF MICRO-METEORITES THAT SCRIBE THEIR WAY THROUGH SPACE.

STILL OTHERS ARE ALMOST COMICAL CONTRAPTIONS BITS AND PIECES OF A HUNDRED OTHER CRAFT, FRAGMENTS OF VESSELS, BOLTED AND STRAPPED TOGETHER

WATCHER, WHO... WHAT ARE THEY? SO MANY SHIPS!

THEY ARE THE *SURVIVORS*, SUSAN. SAD REMNANTS OF ONCE PROUD WORLDS... WORLDS DEVOURED BY GALACTUS!

GALACTUS! IS... IS THAT THE ANSWER, WATCHER? IS THAT WHY REED WAS TAKEN?

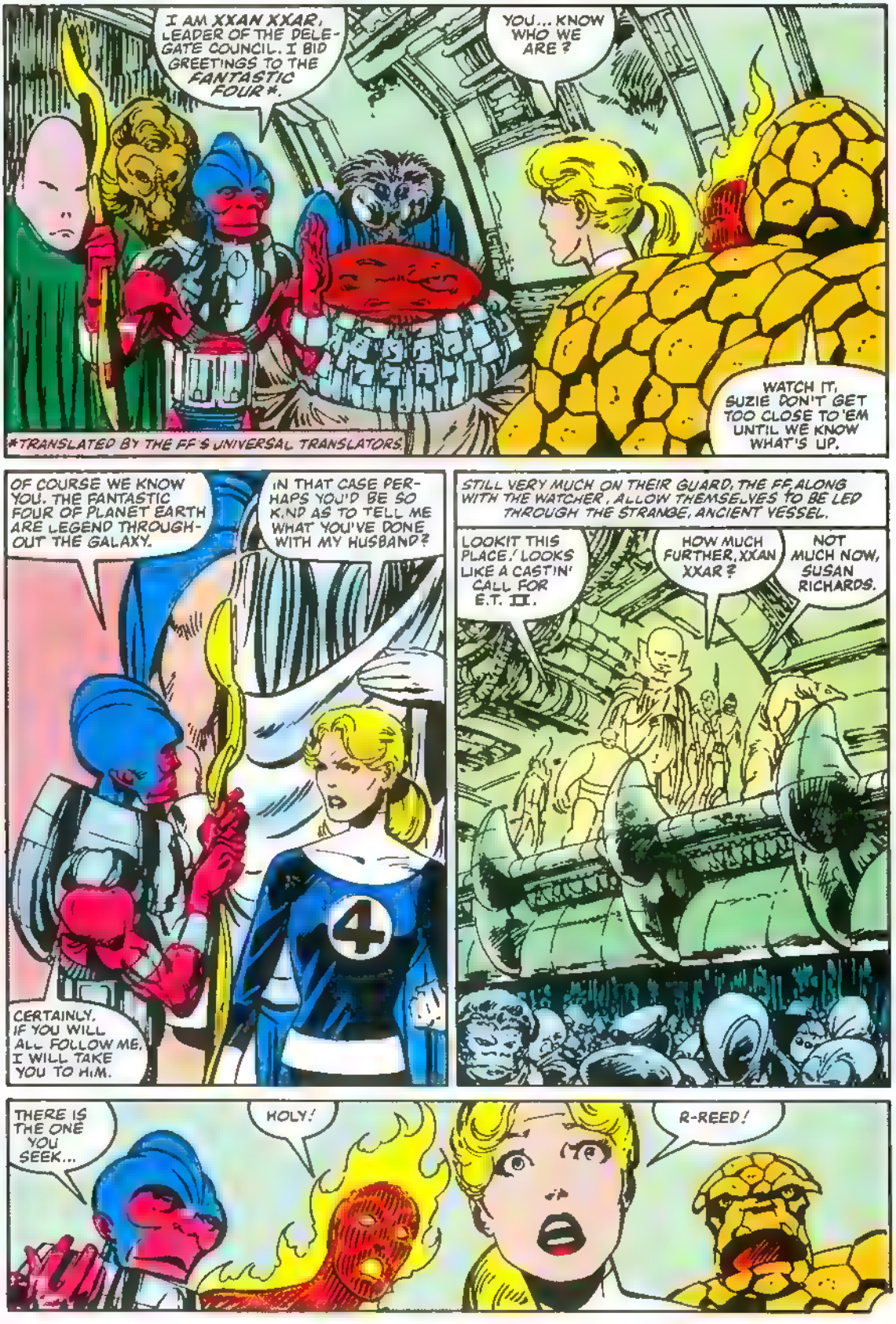
YOU SHALL LEARN SOON ENOUGH, SUSAN. FOR NOW, PREPARE YOURSELVES...

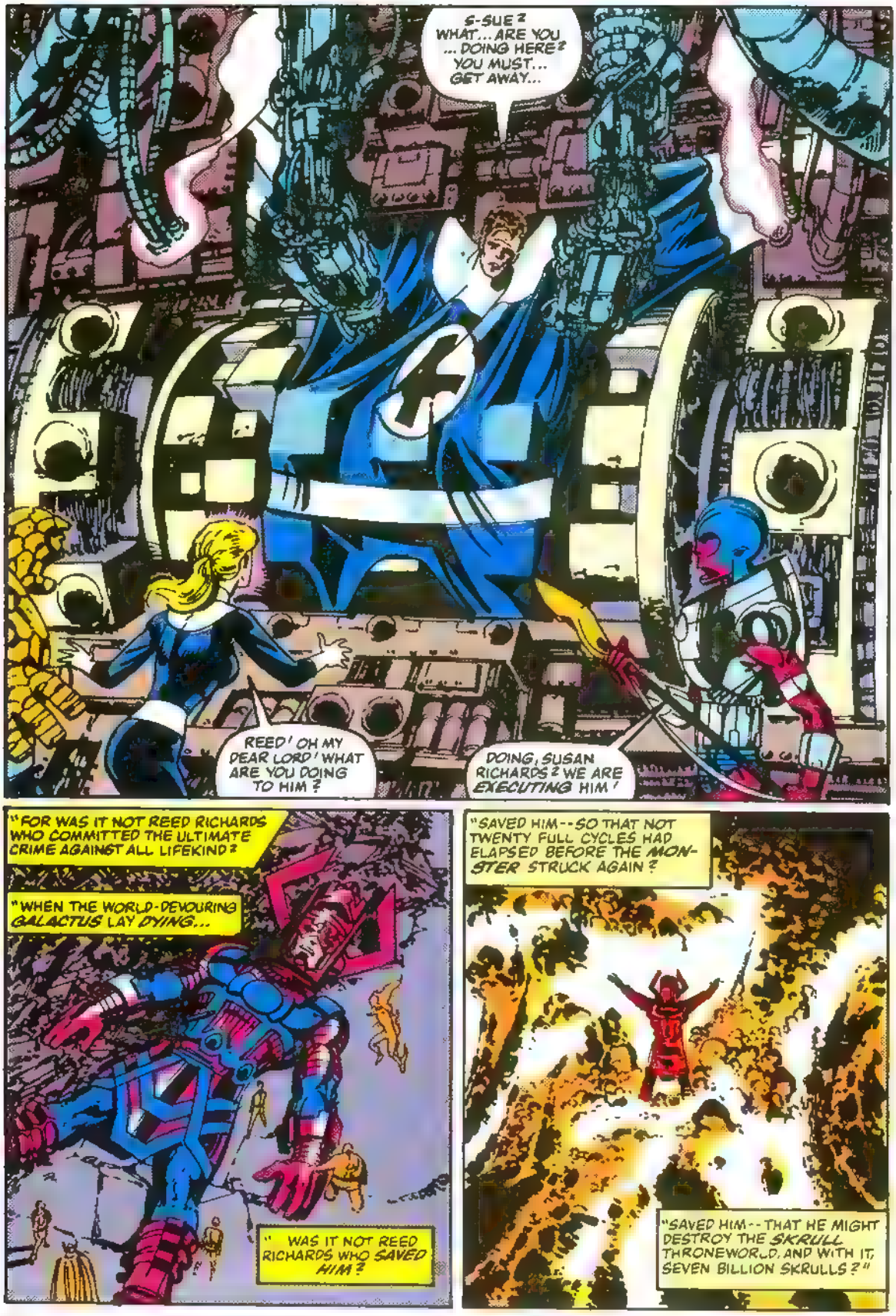
OUR JOURNEY IS AT AN END.

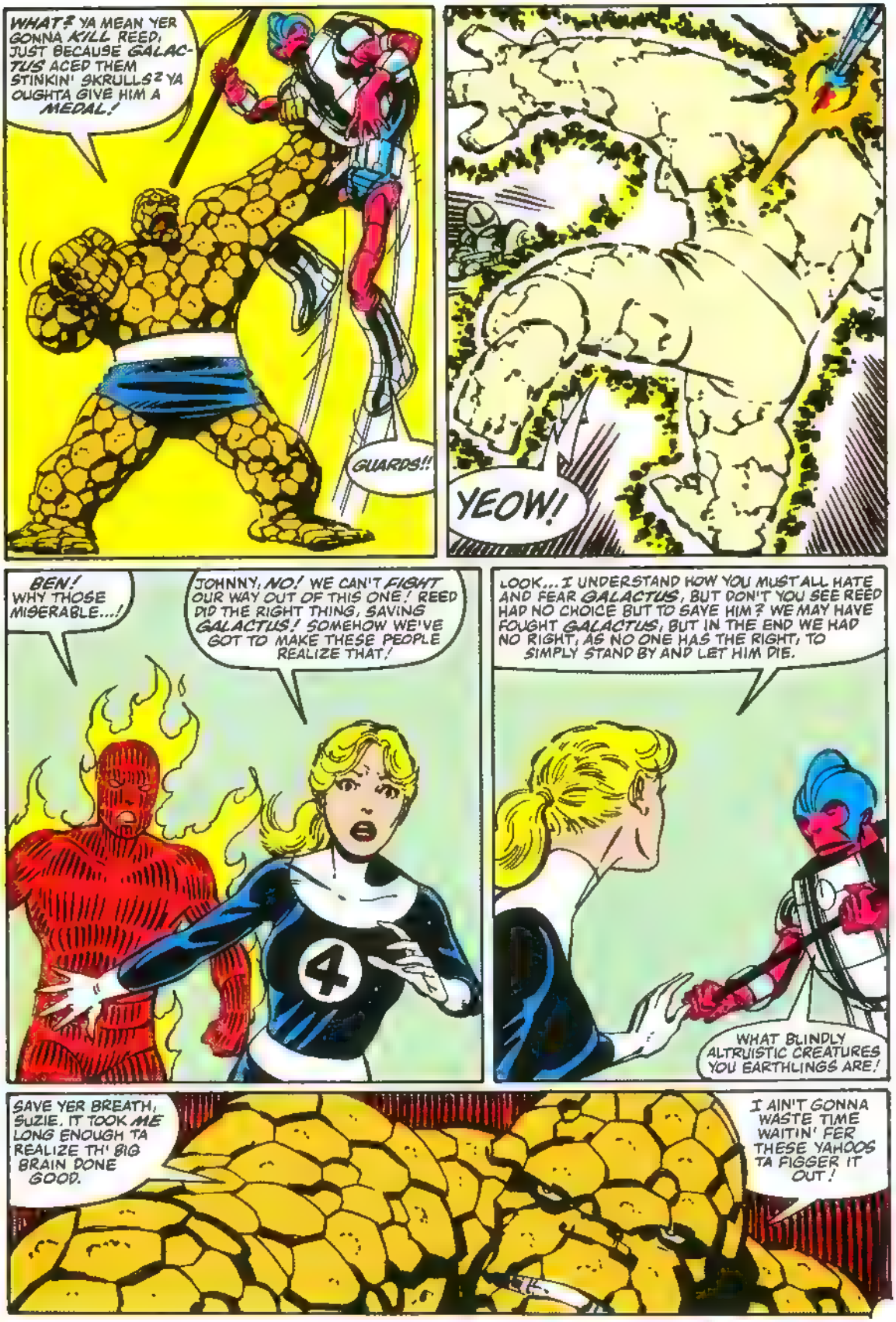
THIS SHIP... IT'S SO HUGE, SO OLD! I CAN ALMOST *FEEL* ITS AGE, LIKE A GREAT WEIGHT.

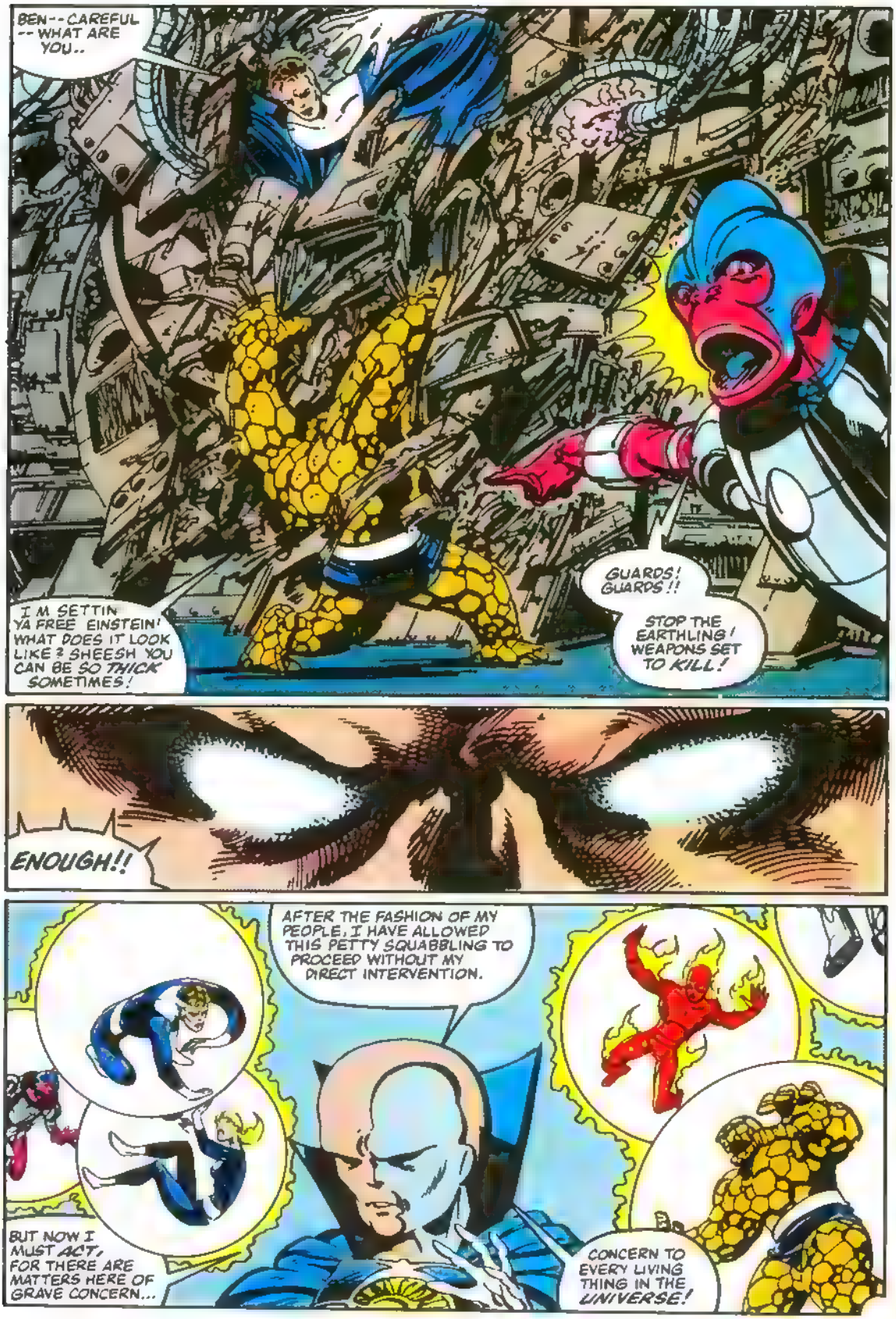
IT'S LIKE THAT SHIP WE ENCOUNTERED IN THE *NEGATIVE ZONE* -- THE ONE THAT HAD BEEN ON A TEN THOUSAND-YEAR QUEST...

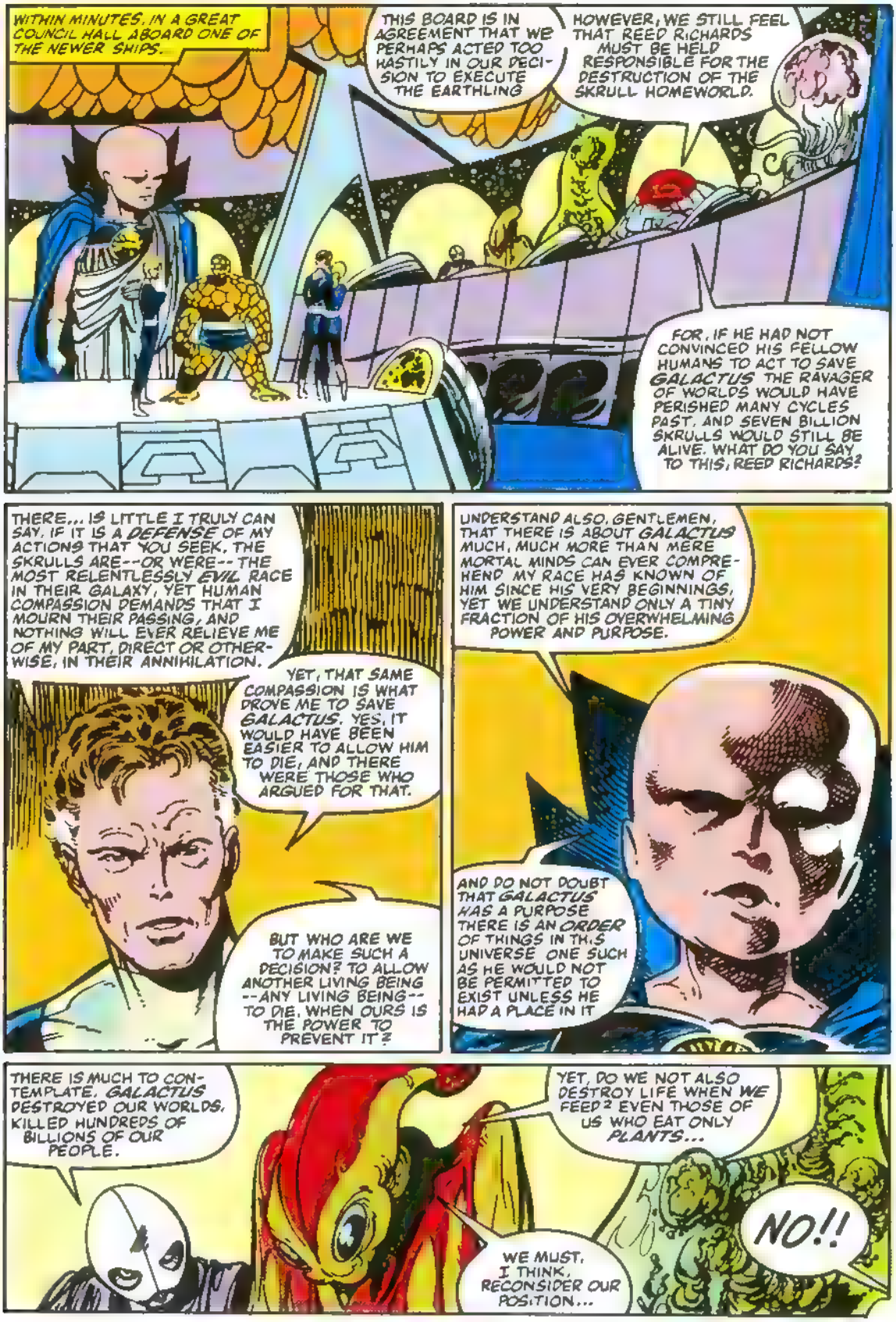
YEAH, WELL THIS AIN'T THE TIME FER NOSTALGIA, HOTSHOT! WE GOT COMPANY!


I AM XXAN XXAR, LEADER OF THE DELEGATE COUNCIL. I BID GREETINGS TO THE FANTASTIC FOUR*.
YOU... KNOW WHO WE ARE?
WATCH IT, SUZIE DON'T GET TOO CLOSE TO 'EM UNTIL WE KNOW WHAT'S UP.
*TRANSLATED BY THE FF'S UNIVERSAL TRANSLATORS.
OF COURSE WE KNOW YOU. THE FANTASTIC FOUR OF PLANET EARTH ARE LEGEND THROUGHOUT THE GALAXY.
IN THAT CASE PERHAPS YOU'D BE SO KIND AS TO TELL ME WHAT YOU'VE DONE WITH MY HUSBAND?
CERTAINLY. IF YOU WILL ALL FOLLOW ME, I WILL TAKE YOU TO HIM.
STILL VERY MUCH ON THEIR GUARD, THE FF ALONG WITH THE WATCHER, ALLOW THEMSELVES TO BE LED THROUGH THE STRANGE, ANCIENT VESSEL.
LOOKIT THIS PLACE! LOOKS LIKE A CASTIN' CALL FOR E.T. II.
HOW MUCH FURTHER, XXAN XXAR?
NOT MUCH NOW, SUSAN RICHARDS.
THERE IS THE ONE YOU SEEK...
HOLY!
R-REED!


S-SUE? WHAT... ARE YOU ... DOING HERE? YOU MUST... GET AWAY...
REED! OH MY DEAR LORD! WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO HIM?
DOING, SUSAN RICHARDS? WE ARE EXECUTING HIM!
"FOR WAS IT NOT REED RICHARDS WHO COMMITTED THE ULTIMATE CRIME AGAINST ALL LIFEKIND?
"WHEN THE WORLD-DEVOURING GALACTUS LAY DYING...
"... WAS IT NOT REED RICHARDS WHO SAVED HIM?
"SAVED HIM--SO THAT NOT TWENTY FULL CYCLES HAD ELAPSED BEFORE THE MONSTER STRUCK AGAIN?
"SAVED HIM--THAT HE MIGHT DESTROY THE SKRULL THRONEWORLD, AND WITH IT, SEVEN BILLION SKRULLS?"


WHAT? YA MEAN YER GONNA KILL REED, JUST BECAUSE GALACTUS ACED THEM STINKIN' SKRULLS? YA OUGHTA GIVE HIM A MEDAL!
GUARDS!!
YEOW!
BEN! WHY THOSE MISERABLE...!
JOHNNY, NO! WE CAN'T FIGHT OUR WAY OUT OF THIS ONE! REED DID THE RIGHT THING, SAVING GALACTUS! SOMEHOW WE'VE GOT TO MAKE THESE PEOPLE REALIZE THAT!
LOOK... I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU MUST ALL HATE AND FEAR GALACTUS, BUT DON'T YOU SEE REED HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO SAVE HIM? WE MAY HAVE FOUGHT GALACTUS, BUT IN THE END WE HAD NO RIGHT, AS NO ONE HAS THE RIGHT, TO SIMPLY STAND BY AND LET HIM DIE.
WHAT BLINDLY ALTRUISTIC CREATURES YOU EARTHLINGS ARE!
SAVE YER BREATH, SUZIE. IT TOOK ME LONG ENOUGH TA REALIZE TH' BIG BRAIN DONE GOOD.
I AIN'T GONNA WASTE TIME WAITIN' FER THESE YAHOOS TA FIGGER IT OUT!


BEN--CAREFUL --WHAT ARE YOU..
I M SETTIN YA FREE EINSTEIN! WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? SHEESH YOU CAN BE SO THICK SOMETIMES!
GUARDS! GUARDS!!
STOP THE EARTHLING! WEAPONS SET TO KILL!
ENOUGH!!
AFTER THE FASHION OF MY PEOPLE, I HAVE ALLOWED THIS PETTY SQUABBLING TO PROCEED WITHOUT MY DIRECT INTERVENTION.
BUT NOW I MUST ACT, FOR THERE ARE MATTERS HERE OF GRAVE CONCERN...
CONCERN TO EVERY LIVING THING IN THE UNIVERSE!


WITHIN MINUTES, IN A GREAT COUNCIL HALL ABOARD ONE OF THE NEWER SHIPS...
THIS BOARD IS IN AGREEMENT THAT WE PERHAPS ACTED TOO HASTILY IN OUR DECISION TO EXECUTE THE EARTHLING
HOWEVER, WE STILL FEEL THAT REED RICHARDS MUST BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SKRULL HOMEWORLD.
FOR, IF HE HAD NOT CONVINCED HIS FELLOW HUMANS TO ACT TO SAVE GALACTUS THE RAVAGER OF WORLDS WOULD HAVE PERISHED MANY CYCLES PAST, AND SEVEN BILLION SKRULLS WOULD STILL BE ALIVE. WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THIS, REED RICHARDS?
THERE... IS LITTLE I TRULY CAN SAY, IF IT IS A DEFENSE OF MY ACTIONS THAT YOU SEEK. THE SKRULLS ARE--OR WERE--THE MOST RELENTLESSLY EVIL RACE IN THEIR GALAXY, YET HUMAN COMPASSION DEMANDS THAT I MOURN THEIR PASSING, AND NOTHING WILL EVER RELIEVE ME OF MY PART, DIRECT OR OTHERWISE, IN THEIR ANNIHILATION.
YET, THAT SAME COMPASSION IS WHAT DROVE ME TO SAVE GALACTUS. YES, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASIER TO ALLOW HIM TO DIE, AND THERE WERE THOSE WHO ARGUED FOR THAT.
BUT WHO ARE WE TO MAKE SUCH A DECISION? TO ALLOW ANOTHER LIVING BEING --ANY LIVING BEING-- TO DIE, WHEN OURS IS THE POWER TO PREVENT IT?
UNDERSTAND ALSO, GENTLEMEN, THAT THERE IS ABOUT GALACTUS MUCH, MUCH MORE THAN MERE MORTAL MINDS CAN EVER COMPREHEND. MY RACE HAS KNOWN OF HIM SINCE HIS VERY BEGINNINGS, YET WE UNDERSTAND ONLY A TINY FRACTION OF HIS OVERWHELMING POWER AND PURPOSE.
AND DO NOT DOUBT THAT GALACTUS HAS A PURPOSE. THERE IS AN ORDER OF THINGS IN THIS UNIVERSE ONE SUCH AS HE WOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO EXIST UNLESS HE HAD A PLACE IN IT.
THERE IS MUCH TO CONTEMPLATE. GALACTUS DESTROYED OUR WORLDS, KILLED HUNDREDS OF BILLIONS OF OUR PEOPLE.
YET, DO WE NOT ALSO DESTROY LIFE WHEN WE FEED? EVEN THOSE OF US WHO EAT ONLY PLANTS...
NO!!
WE MUST, I THINK, RECONSIDER OUR POSITION...

WE ARE LILANDRA, MAJESTRIX SHI'AR. WE HAVE BEEN INFORMED OF YOUR CRIME.
WE HAVE ALREADY GIVEN WARNING TO THE EARTHLINGS ONCE THAT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS WOULD NOT GO UNPUNISHED.
FOR HIS UNSPEAKABLE CRIME AGAINST ALL THINGS THAT LIVE...
REED RICHARDS MUST DIE!

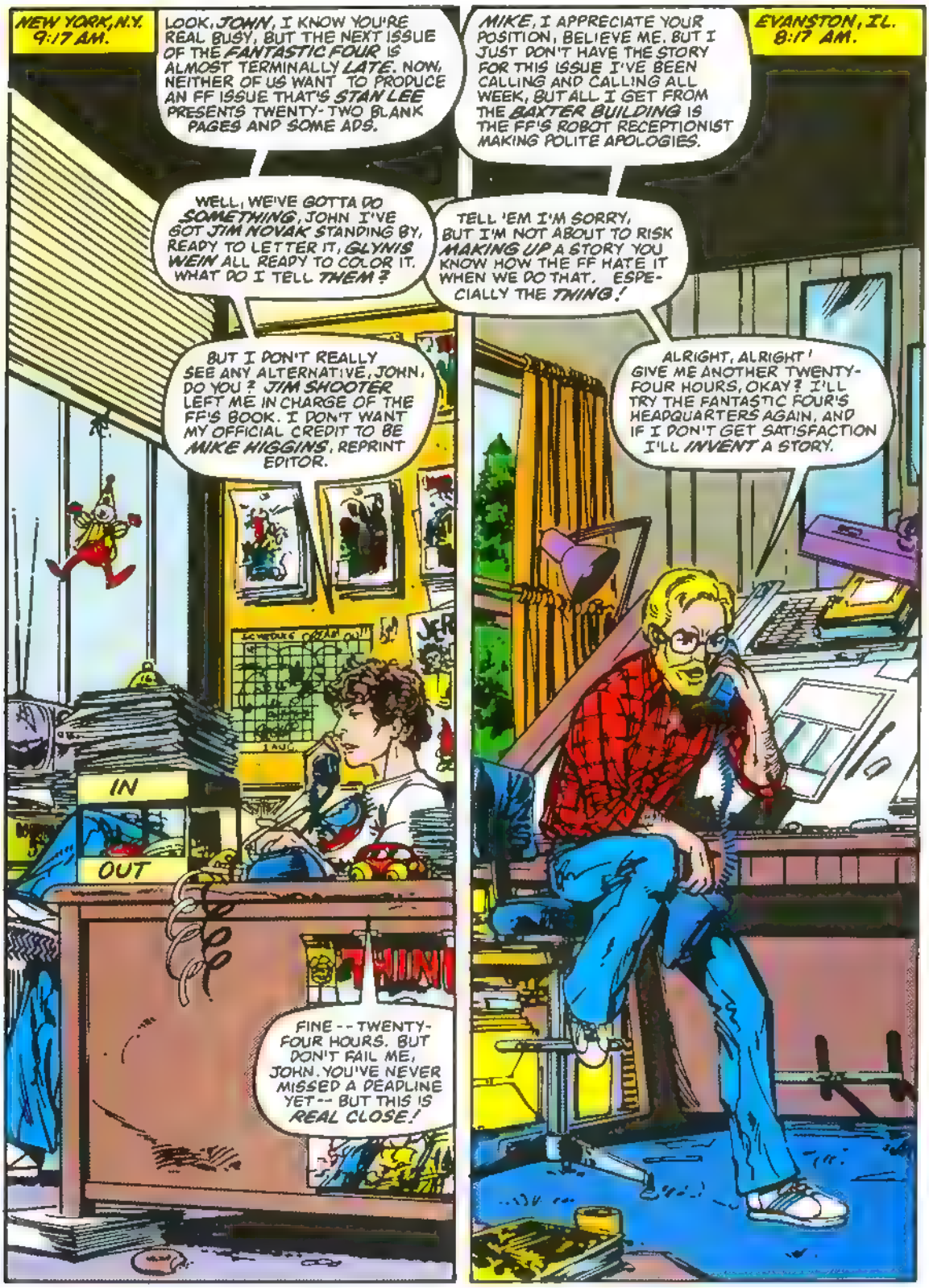
The following, and final, segment deserves a bit of explanation.

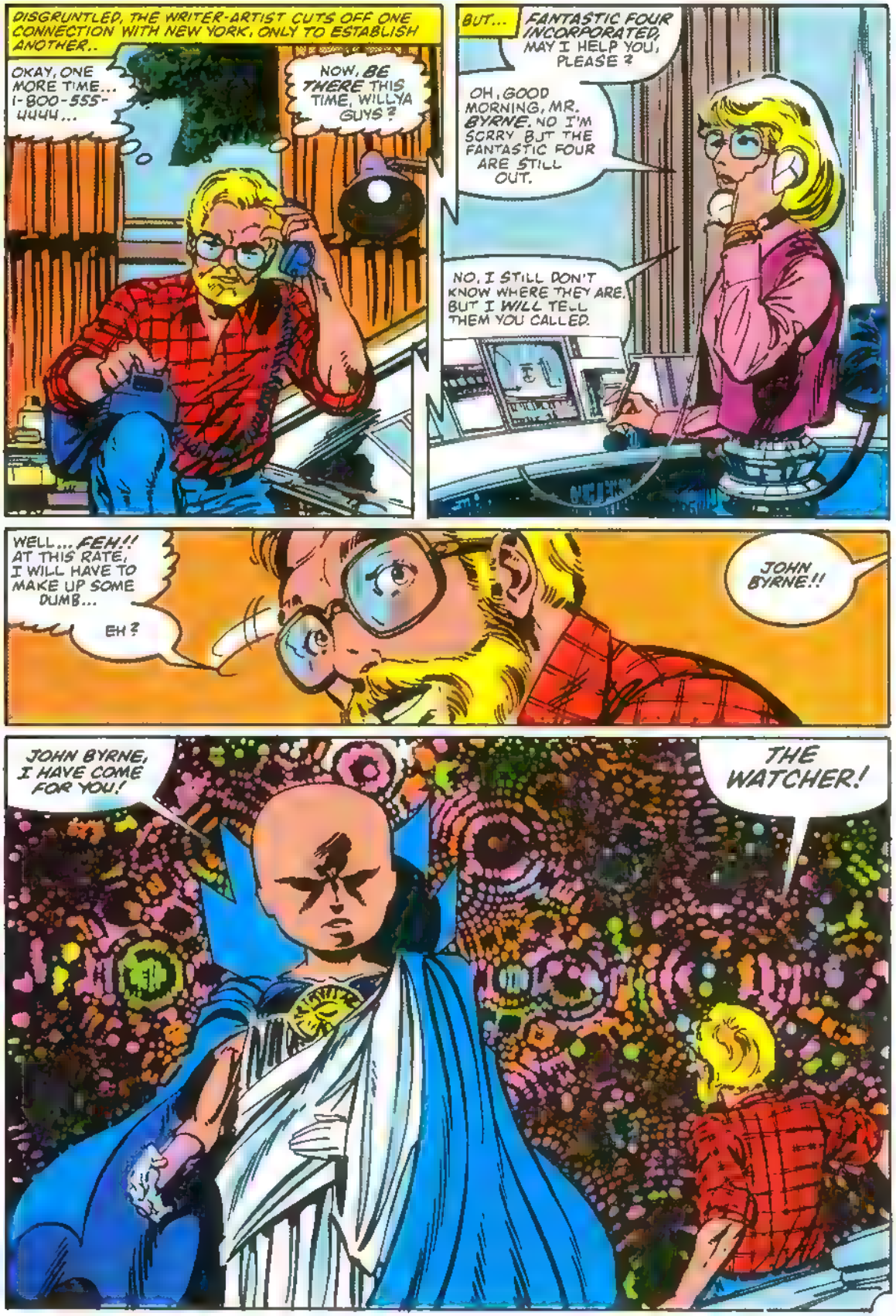
One summer, all of Marvel's editors were sent to the yearly San Diego convention, leaving the assistant editors "in charge" of the books for one month.

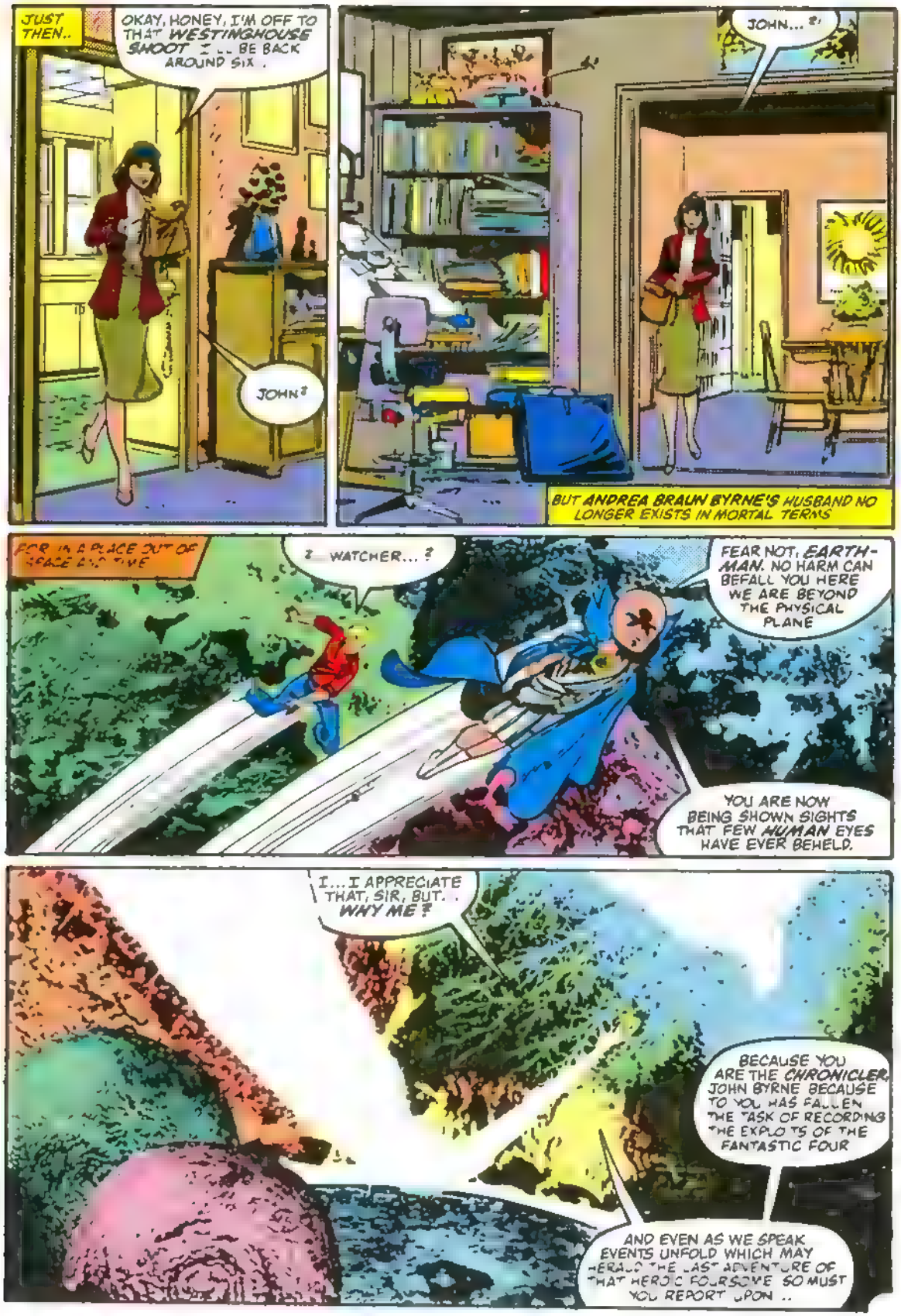
Then editor-in-chief Jim Shooter ordered that something "unusual" be done in all the books in that "assistant editor's month."

Since it coincided with the wrap-up of John's Galactus storyline, he decided to borrow something that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby had established way back in FANTASTIC FOUR #10, and have himself appear as the FF's "chronicler."

With that in mind, let's join John on his trip across the universe to witness our smashing conclusion (bring a warm sweater--it gets mighty cold in the interstellar void...)


NEW YORK, N.Y. 9:17 AM.
LOOK, JOHN, I KNOW YOU'RE REAL BUSY, BUT THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR IS ALMOST TERMINALLY LATE. NOW, NEITHER OF US WANT TO PRODUCE AN FF ISSUE THAT'S STAN LEE PRESENTS TWENTY-TWO BLANK PAGES AND SOME ADS.
WELL, WE'VE GOTTA DO SOMETHING, JOHN I'VE GOT JIM NOVAK STANDING BY, READY TO LETTER IT, GLYNIS WEIN ALL READY TO COLOR IT. WHAT DO I TELL THEM?
BUT I DON'T REALLY SEE ANY ALTERNATIVE, JOHN, DO YOU? JIM SHOOTER LEFT ME IN CHARGE OF THE FF'S BOOK. I DON'T WANT MY OFFICIAL CREDIT TO BE MIKE HIGGINS, REPRINT EDITOR.
IN
OUT
THING
FINE -- TWENTY-FOUR HOURS. BUT DON'T FAIL ME, JOHN. YOU'VE NEVER MISSED A DEADLINE YET -- BUT THIS IS REAL CLOSE!
EVANSTON, IL. 8:17 AM.
MIKE, I APPRECIATE YOUR POSITION, BELIEVE ME. BUT I JUST DON'T HAVE THE STORY FOR THIS ISSUE I'VE BEEN CALLING AND CALLING ALL WEEK, BUT ALL I GET FROM THE BAXTER BUILDING IS THE FF'S ROBOT RECEPTIONIST MAKING POLITE APOLOGIES.
TELL 'EM I'M SORRY, BUT I'M NOT ABOUT TO RISK MAKING UP A STORY YOU KNOW HOW THE FF HATE IT WHEN WE DO THAT. ESPECIALLY THE THING!
ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT! GIVE ME ANOTHER TWENTY-FOUR HOURS, OKAY? I'LL TRY THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S HEADQUARTERS AGAIN, AND IF I DON'T GET SATISFACTION I'LL INVENT A STORY.


DISGRUNTLED, THE WRITER-ARTIST CUTS OFF ONE CONNECTION WITH NEW YORK, ONLY TO ESTABLISH ANOTHER..
OKAY, ONE MORE TIME... 1-800-555-4444...
NOW, BE THERE THIS TIME, WILLYA GUYS?
BUT...
FANTASTIC FOUR INCORPORATED, MAY I HELP YOU, PLEASE?
OH, GOOD MORNING, MR. BYRNE. NO I'M SORRY BUT THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE STILL OUT.
NO, I STILL DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY ARE. BUT I WILL TELL THEM YOU CALLED.
WELL... FEH!! AT THIS RATE, I WILL HAVE TO MAKE UP SOME DUMB...
EH?
JOHN BYRNE!!
JOHN BYRNE, I HAVE COME FOR YOU!
THE WATCHER!


JUST THEN..
OKAY, HONEY, I'M OFF TO THAT WESTINGHOUSE SHOOT ... BE BACK AROUND SIX.
JOHN?
JOHN...?
BUT ANDREA BRAUN BYRNE'S HUSBAND NO LONGER EXISTS IN MORTAL TERMS
FOR IN A PLACE OUT OF SPACE AND TIME
WATCHER...?
FEAR NOT, EARTH-MAN. NO HARM CAN BEFALL YOU HERE WE ARE BEYOND THE PHYSICAL PLANE
YOU ARE NOW BEING SHOWN SIGHTS THAT FEW HUMAN EYES HAVE EVER BEHELD.
I... I APPRECIATE THAT, SIR, BUT.. WHY ME?
BECAUSE YOU ARE THE CHRONICLER, JOHN BYRNE BECAUSE TO YOU HAS FALLEN THE TASK OF RECORDING THE EXPLOITS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR
AND EVEN AS WE SPEAK EVENTS UNFOLD WHICH MAY HERALD THE LAST ADVENTURE OF THAT HEROIC FOURSOME SO MUST YOU REPORT UPON ..

THE TRIAL OF REED RICHARDS

I CAN'T *BELIEVE* ALL THIS! I WISH THE WATCHER HAD LET ME TAKE TIME TO GRAB A CAMERA--OR AT LEAST MY SKETCHBOOK!

MRS. *RICHARDS* --WHAT IS THIS? WHAT'S HAPPENING?

HUH? WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU DOING HERE, BYRNE?

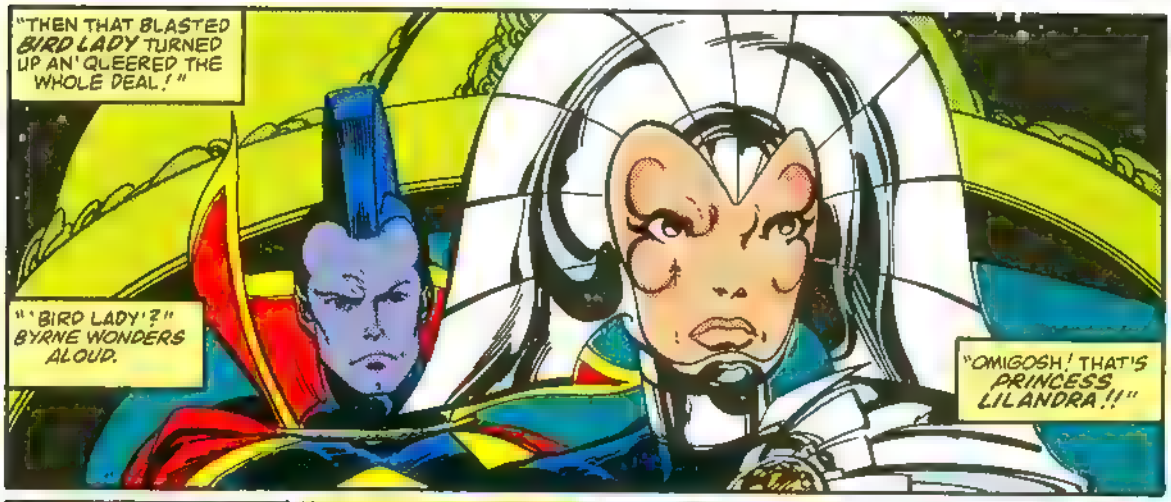
HUMPH! MAYBE HE'S COME TA TRY AN GET TH' STORY *RIGHT* THIS TIME!

YEAH? WELL, I THINK WE'RE TALKING ABOUT SOMETHING MORE *IMPORTANT* THAN A *COMIC BOOK STORY!*

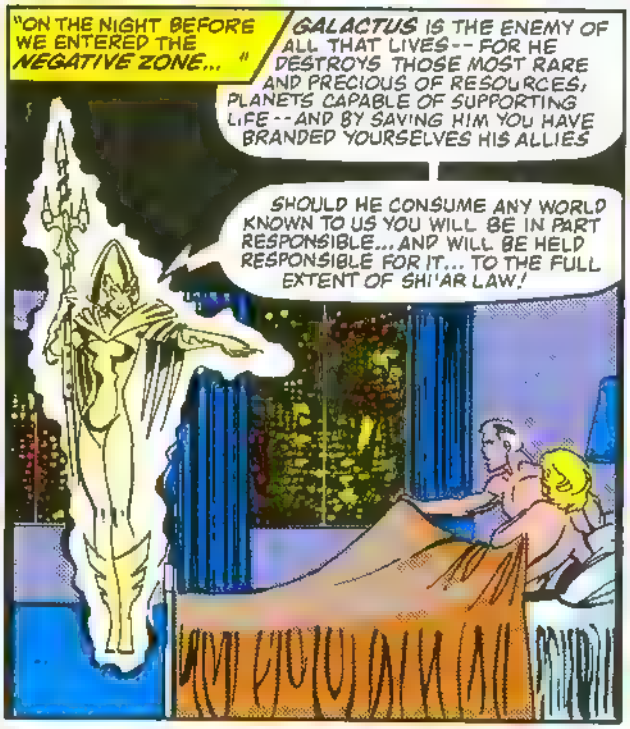
APPARENTLY THE WATCHER DISAGREES WITH YOU, KID. *SUE...?*

OH, JOHN, IT'S JUST *TERRIBLE!* YOU REMEMBER WHEN *REED* HELPED SAVE THE [illegible] *GALACTUS* HAS CONSUMED WANT TO *KILL* REED!

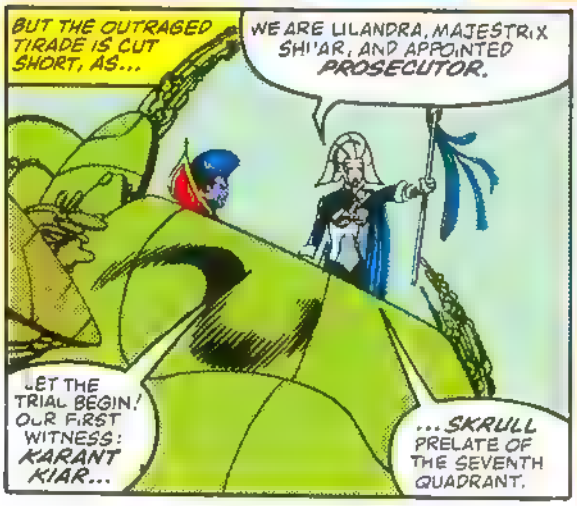
[illegible] THING SAVIN' THE *BIG G...*

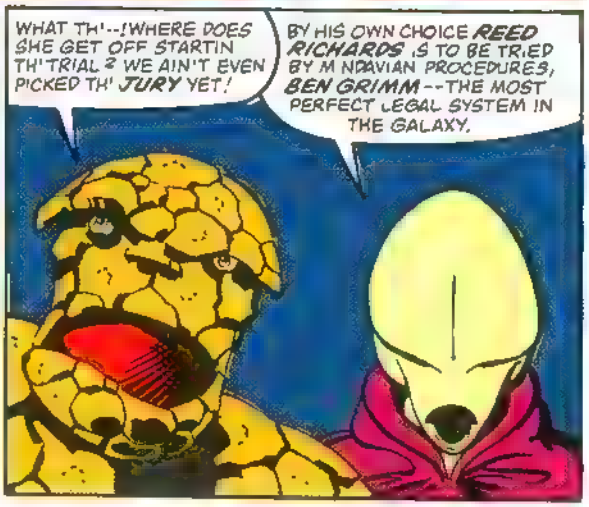

"THEN THAT BLASTED BIRD LADY TURNED UP AN' QUEERED THE WHOLE DEAL!"
"'BIRD LADY'?" BYRNE WONDERS ALOUD.
"OMIGOSH! THAT'S PRINCESS LILANDRA!!"

LILANDRA IS THE NAME, ALRIGHT, JOHN. BUT THESE DAYS SHE'S CALLING HERSELF "MAJESTRIX SHI'AR" -- WHATEVER THAT MEANS.
WE FIRST ENCOUNTERED HER SOME MONTHS AGO... OUR TIME


"ON THE NIGHT BEFORE WE ENTERED THE NEGATIVE ZONE..."
GALACTUS IS THE ENEMY OF ALL THAT LIVES -- FOR HE DESTROYS THOSE MOST RARE AND PRECIOUS OF RESOURCES, PLANETS CAPABLE OF SUPPORTING LIFE -- AND BY SAVING HIM YOU HAVE BRANDED YOURSELVES HIS ALLIES
SHOULD HE CONSUME ANY WORLD KNOWN TO US YOU WILL BE IN PART RESPONSIBLE... AND WILL BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR IT... TO THE FULL EXTENT OF SHI'AR LAW!

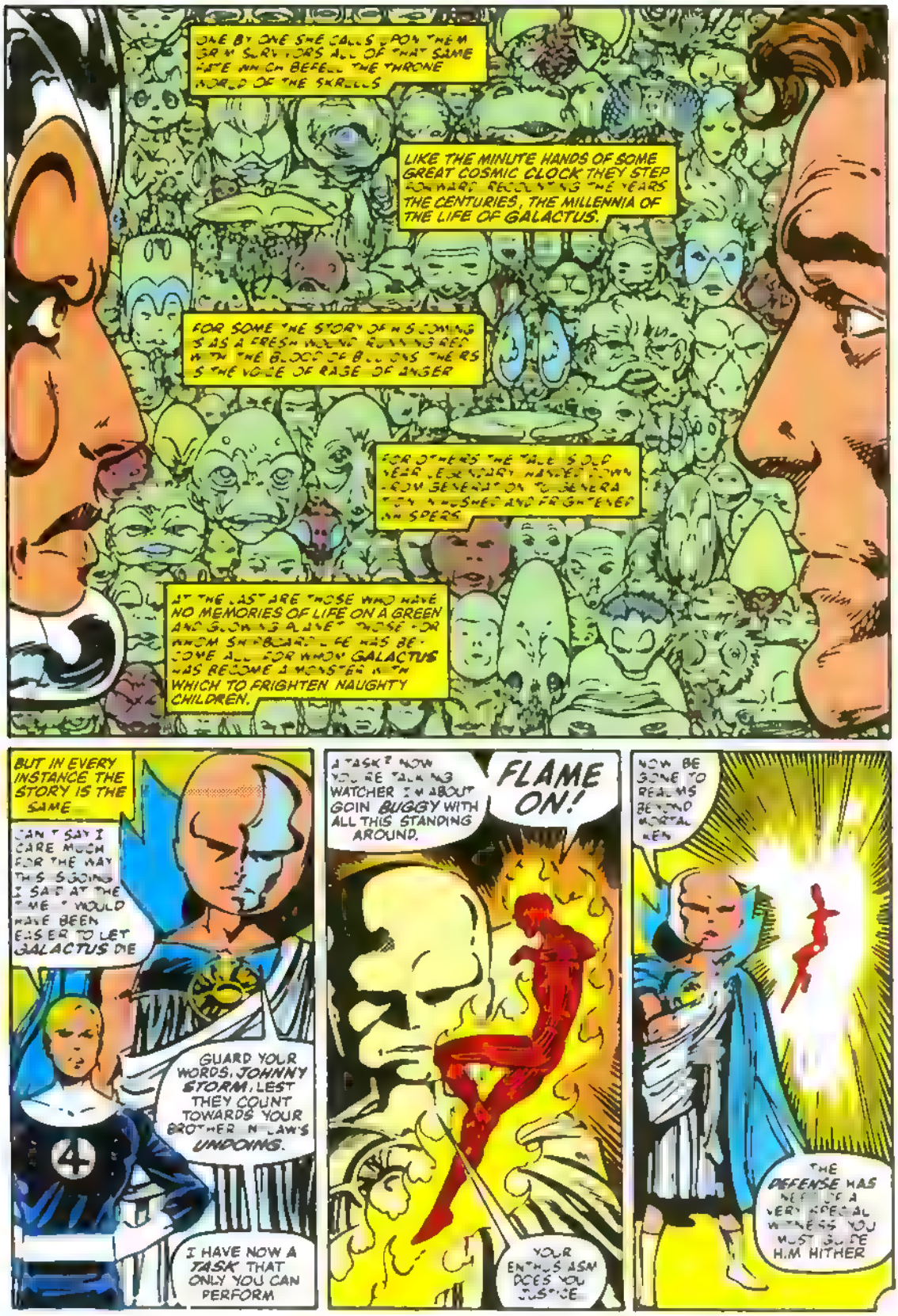
WHY THAT ARROGANT W TCH ' I ALWAYS HAD THE IMPRESSION SHE WAS TOO FULL OF HER OWN IMPORTANCE, BUT TO ACTUALLY THREATEN THE FANTASTIC FOUR...!

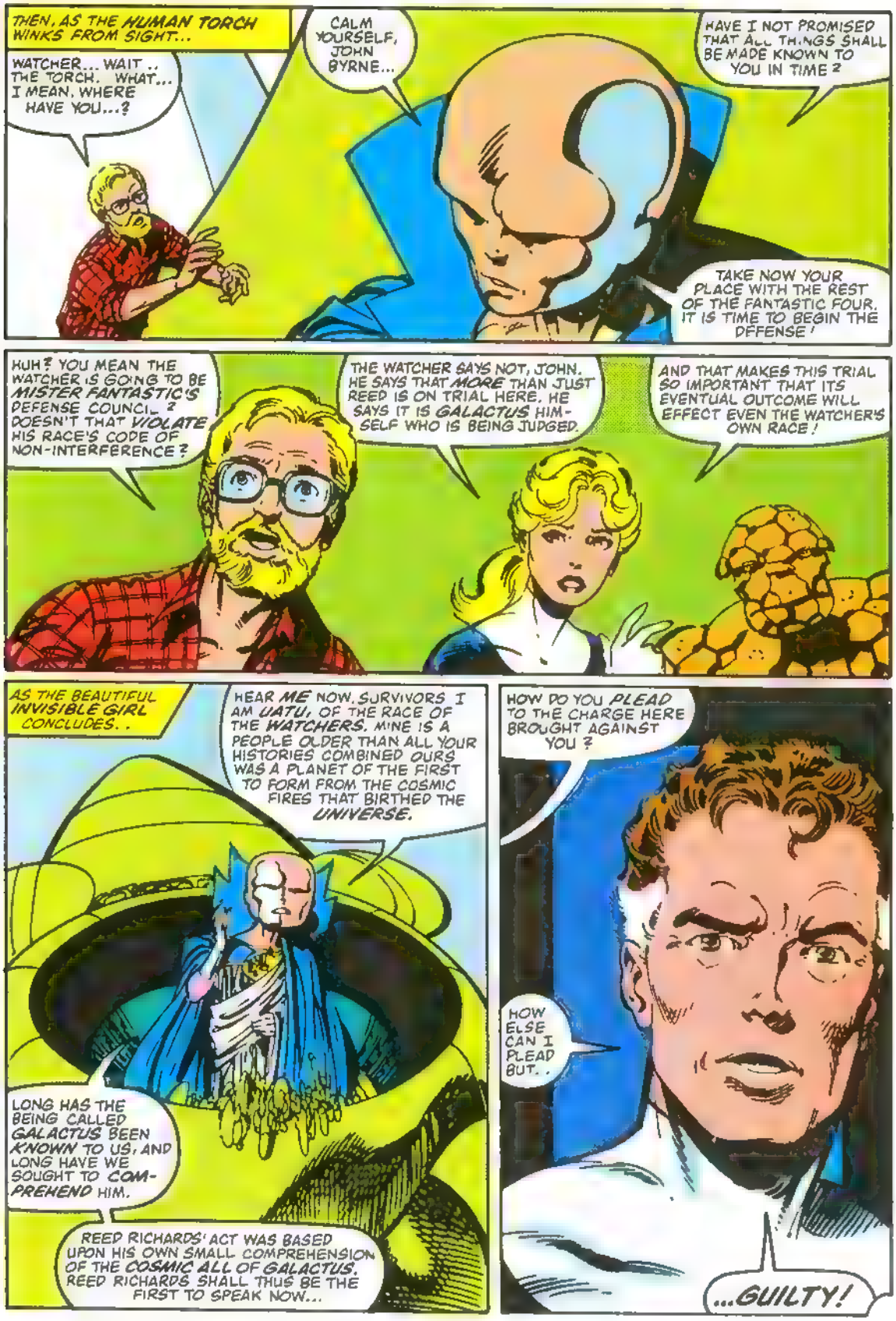

BUT THE OUTRAGED TIRADE IS CUT SHORT, AS...
WE ARE LILANDRA, MAJESTRIX SHI'AR, AND APPOINTED PROSECUTOR.
LET THE TRIAL BEGIN! OUR FIRST WITNESS: KARANT KIAR...
...SKRULL PRELATE OF THE SEVENTH QUADRANT.

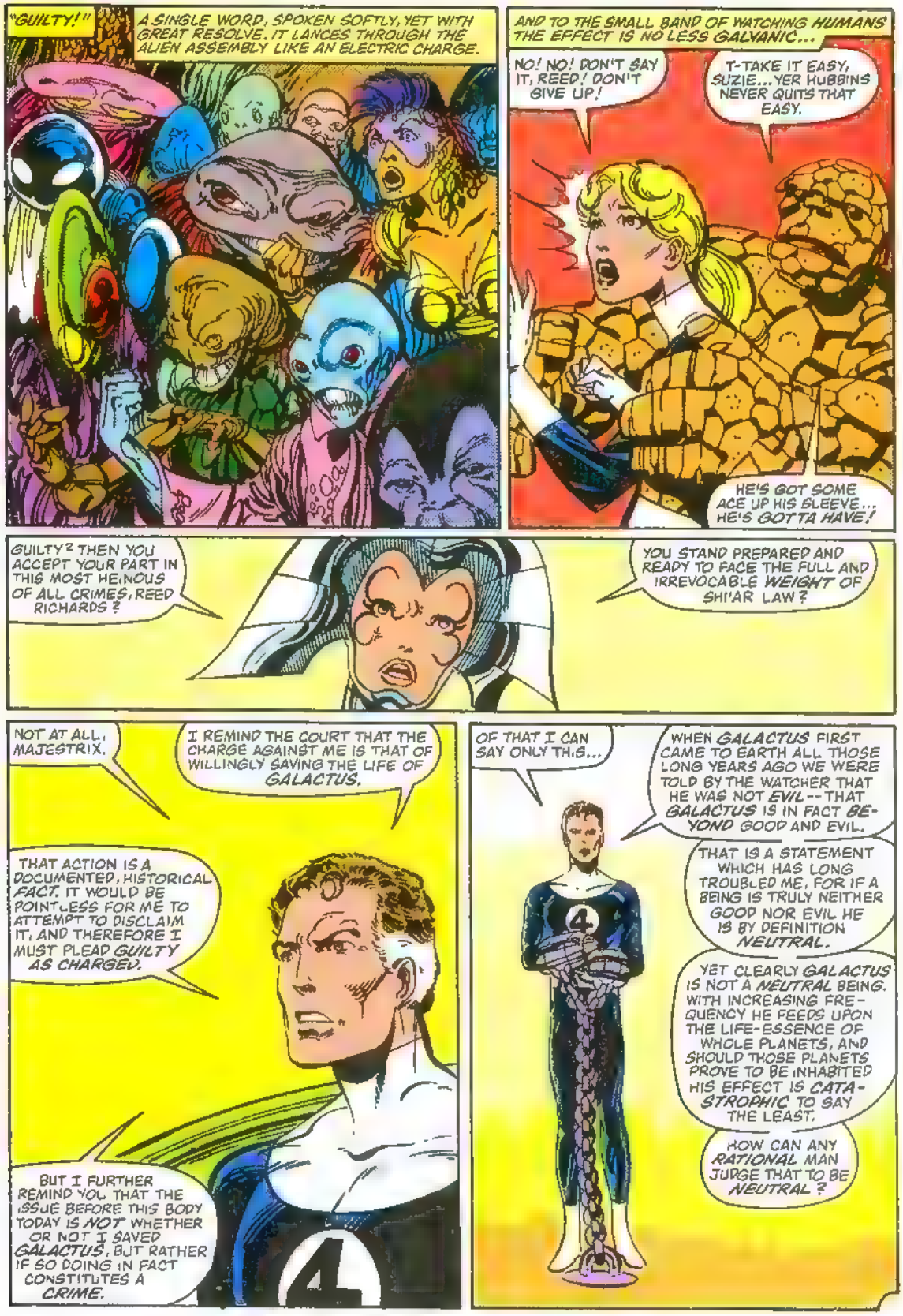

WHAT TH'--! WHERE DOES SHE GET OFF STARTIN TH' TRIAL? WE AIN'T EVEN PICKED TH' JURY YET!
BY HIS OWN CHOICE REED RICHARDS IS TO BE TRIED BY M NDAVIAN PROCEDURES, BEN GRIMM -- THE MOST PERFECT LEGAL SYSTEM IN THE GALAXY.

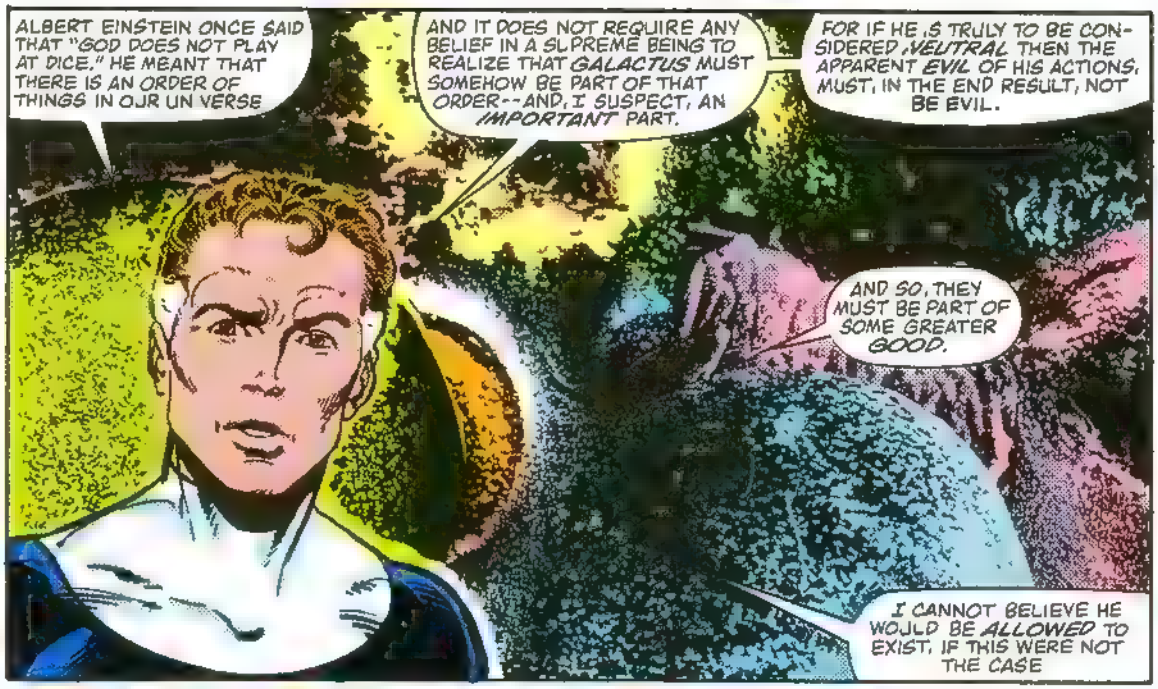
SEE THE GREAT GLOW GLOBES THAT DEPEND FROM THE VAULT OF THE COURT? NOTE HOW THEIR COLORS FLICKER AND CHANGE CONSTANTLY?
THEY MONITOR THE EMOTIONS, THE JUDGEMENTS OF ALL PRESENT. THUS ALL--ACCUSED, WITNESSES, PROSECUTION, DEFENSE--ALL ARE JUDGE AND JURY. AND SHOULD ALL THE GLOBES TURN WHITE AT ANY TIME, THEN IS THE VERDICT NOT GUILTY, AND THE TRIAL IS AT AN END.
HUH!
"NOW ATTEND, BEN GRIMM. THE WITNESS SPEAKS..."
I AM KARANT KIAR, I AM PRELATE OF THE SEVENTH QUADRANT OF THE SKRULL EMPIRE.
HEAR MY WORDS, O YOU GATHERED RACES, SURVIVORS OF THE HUNGER OF GALACTUS.
HEAR MY WORDS, AND SHARE MY ANGUISH AND MY RAGE AT THE DEATH OF A WORLD!
"SIXTEEN SPANS PAST, THE HERALD OF GALACTUS APPROACHED OUR
"EVERY AVAILABLE SHIP WAS SENT TO STOP HER, BUT THE ONE-TIME EARTHLING SMASHED THEM ALL!
"THUS DID GALACTUS COME AT LAST
"FOR TIME OUT OF MEMORY WE SKRULLS HAVE FEARED GALACTUS, AND HIDDEN OUR ENERGIES FROM HIM.
NOW THERE WAS NO HIDING...
'AS GALACTUS SANK BENEATH THE PLANET'S CRUST SO DID THAT CRUST BURST
"LIKE THE SKIN OF SOME OVERRIPE FRUIT IT SPLIT, AND SPILLED ITS BLAZING JUICES ACROSS THE SURFACE

"AND, SINKING THROUGH THE MOLTEN ROCK TO THE VERY CORE, GALACTUS THERE BECAME A RAVENOUS MAW...
...A LIVING BLACK HOLE, SUCKING INTO ITSELF EVERY IOTA OF PLANETARY MASS.
"ONLY TO SPEW THEM OUT A MOMENT LATER, CRACKED, DRAINED EMPTIED OF THAT MYSTIC ESSENCE WHICH IS THE LIFE-FORCE OF A WORLD!
"ALL THIS WE SAW ON LONG RANGE SCANNERS, AS WE RACED FROM THIRTY THOUSAND LIGHT YEARS DISTANT...
...TO ARRIVE TOO LATE..
..TOO LATE.
THE THRONEWORLD WAS NO MORE. SHATTERED.. LIFELESS FRAGMENTS ALONE LEFT TO MARK THE POSITION OF A ONCE PROUD PLANET
AND IT NEED NOT HAVE BEEN SO! OUR EMPRESS RIKLLL, OUR BELOVED PRINCESS ANELLE, SEVEN BILLION SKRULLS WOULD STILL BE ALIVE! BUT FOR THE ACTIONS OF ONE HUMAN!
BUT FOR REED RICHARDS!
AND, IN THE DOCK...
HE'S RIGHT. IF I HAD NOT ACTED TO SAVE GALACTUS ALL THOSE SKRULLS WOULD STILL BE ALIVE
IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO COMPREHEND-- SEVEN BILLION PEOPLE, ANNIHILATED IN A MATTER OF HOURS EVIL THOUGH THE SKRULLS MAY BE, IT STILL SEEMS A CRIME TOO HORRIBLE FOR EVEN THE MOST CONTEMPTIBLE OF ALL THE UNIVERSE'S RACES TO SUFFER.
YET, I DID NOT ACT WITHOUT THINKING I BELIEVED WHAT I DID WAS RIGHT!
AND I STILL BELIEVE IT!
MEANWHILE...
THE SKRULL HAS SPOKEN, AND HIS IS BUT ONE SMALL VOICE, CRYING OUT ITS TORMENT IN A VAST, AGONIZING SYMPHONY OF ANGUISH.
THE PROSECUTION WILL NOW SHOW THAT REED RICHARDS KNEW WHAT HE DID--KNEW THE INEVITABLE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS ACTIONS!

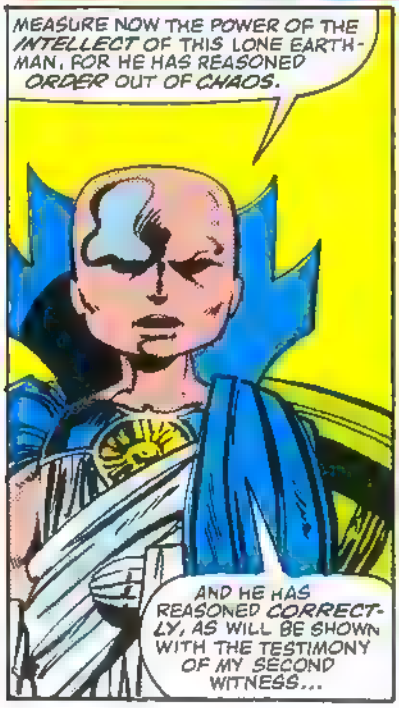

ONE BY ONE SHE CALLS UPON THEM OR THEIR SURVIVORS ALL OF THAT SAME RACE WHICH BEFELL THE THRONE WORLD OF THE SKRULLS
LIKE THE MINUTE HANDS OF SOME GREAT COSMIC CLOCK THEY STEP FORWARD RECOUNTING THE YEARS THE CENTURIES, THE MILLENNIA OF THE LIFE OF GALACTUS.
FOR SOME THE STORY OF HIS COMING IS AS A FRESH WOUND RUNNING RED WITH THE BLOOD OF BILLIONS THERE IS THE VOICE OF RAGE OF ANGER
FOR OTHERS THE TALE IS OLD YEAR AFTER YEAR HARVEST AFTER HARVEST HAVE COME AND GONE IN GENERATION TO GENERATION HUSHED AND FRIGHTENED WHISPERS
AT THE LAST ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NO MEMORIES OF LIFE ON A GREEN AND GROWING PLANET THOSE FOR WHOM SUFFERING HE HAS BECOME ALL FOR WHOM GALACTUS HAS BECOME A MONSTER WITH WHICH TO FRIGHTEN NAUGHTY CHILDREN.
BUT IN EVERY INSTANCE THE STORY IS THE SAME
CAN'T SAY I CARE MUCH FOR THE WAY THIS IS GOING I SAID AT THE TIME I WOULD HAVE BEEN EASIER TO LET GALACTUS DIE
GUARD YOUR WORDS, JOHNNY STORM, LEST THEY COUNT TOWARDS YOUR BROTHER-IN-LAW'S UNDOING.
I HAVE NOW A TASK THAT ONLY YOU CAN PERFORM
A TASK? NOW YOU'RE TALKING WATCHER I'M ABOUT GOIN' BUGGY WITH ALL THIS STANDING AROUND.
FLAME ON!
YOUR ENTHUSIASM DOES YOU JUSTICE
NOW BE GONE TO REALMS BEYOND MORTAL KEN
THE DEFENSE HAS NEED OF A VERY SPECIAL WITNESS YOU MUST GUIDE HIM HITHER

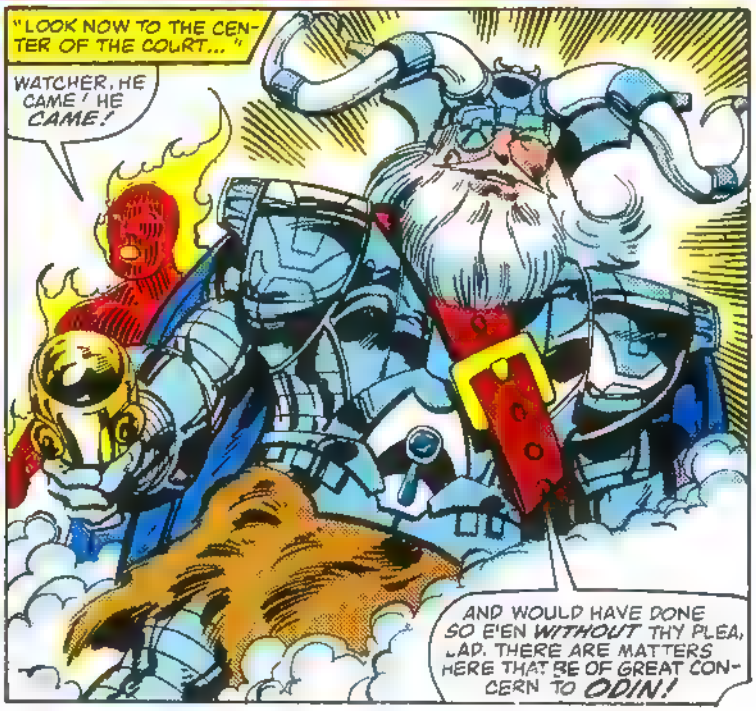

THEN, AS THE HUMAN TORCH WINKS FROM SIGHT...
WATCHER... WAIT .. THE TORCH. WHAT... I MEAN, WHERE HAVE YOU...?
CALM YOURSELF, JOHN BYRNE...
HAVE I NOT PROMISED THAT ALL THINGS SHALL BE MADE KNOWN TO YOU IN TIME?
TAKE NOW YOUR PLACE WITH THE REST OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR. IT IS TIME TO BEGIN THE DEFENSE!
HUH? YOU MEAN THE WATCHER IS GOING TO BE MISTER FANTASTIC'S DEFENSE COUNCIL? DOESN'T THAT VIOLATE HIS RACE'S CODE OF NON-INTERFERENCE?
THE WATCHER SAYS NOT, JOHN. HE SAYS THAT MORE THAN JUST REED IS ON TRIAL HERE. HE SAYS IT IS GALACTUS HIMSELF WHO IS BEING JUDGED.
AND THAT MAKES THIS TRIAL SO IMPORTANT THAT ITS EVENTUAL OUTCOME WILL EFFECT EVEN THE WATCHER'S OWN RACE!
AS THE BEAUTIFUL INVISIBLE GIRL CONCLUDES..
HEAR ME NOW, SURVIVORS I AM UATU, OF THE RACE OF THE WATCHERS. MINE IS A PEOPLE OLDER THAN ALL YOUR HISTORIES COMBINED OURS WAS A PLANET OF THE FIRST TO FORM FROM THE COSMIC FIRES THAT BIRTHED THE UNIVERSE.
LONG HAS THE BEING CALLED GALACTUS BEEN KNOWN TO US, AND LONG HAVE WE SOUGHT TO COMPREHEND HIM.
REED RICHARDS' ACT WAS BASED UPON HIS OWN SMALL COMPREHENSION OF THE COSMIC ALL OF GALACTUS. REED RICHARDS SHALL THUS BE THE FIRST TO SPEAK NOW...
HOW DO YOU PLEAD TO THE CHARGE HERE BROUGHT AGAINST YOU?
HOW ELSE CAN I PLEAD BUT..
...GUILTY!


"GUILTY!"
A SINGLE WORD, SPOKEN SOFTLY, YET WITH GREAT RESOLVE. IT LANCES THROUGH THE ALIEN ASSEMBLY LIKE AN ELECTRIC CHARGE.
AND TO THE SMALL BAND OF WATCHING HUMANS THE EFFECT IS NO LESS GALVANIC...
NO! NO! DON'T SAY IT, REED! DON'T GIVE UP!
T-TAKE IT EASY, SUZIE... YER HUBBINS NEVER QUITS THAT EASY.
HE'S GOT SOME ACE UP HIS SLEEVE... HE'S GOTTA HAVE!
GUILTY? THEN YOU ACCEPT YOUR PART IN THIS MOST HEINOUS OF ALL CRIMES, REED RICHARDS?
YOU STAND PREPARED AND READY TO FACE THE FULL AND IRREVOCABLE WEIGHT OF SHI'AR LAW?
NOT AT ALL, MAJESTRIX.
I REMIND THE COURT THAT THE CHARGE AGAINST ME IS THAT OF WILLINGLY SAVING THE LIFE OF GALACTUS.
THAT ACTION IS A DOCUMENTED, HISTORICAL FACT. IT WOULD BE POINTLESS FOR ME TO ATTEMPT TO DISCLAIM IT, AND THEREFORE I MUST PLEAD GUILTY AS CHARGED.
BUT I FURTHER REMIND YOU THAT THE ISSUE BEFORE THIS BODY TODAY IS NOT WHETHER OR NOT I SAVED GALACTUS, BUT RATHER IF SO DOING IN FACT CONSTITUTES A CRIME.
OF THAT I CAN SAY ONLY THIS...
WHEN GALACTUS FIRST CAME TO EARTH ALL THOSE LONG YEARS AGO WE WERE TOLD BY THE WATCHER THAT HE WAS NOT EVIL -- THAT GALACTUS IS IN FACT BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL.
THAT IS A STATEMENT WHICH HAS LONG TROUBLED ME, FOR IF A BEING IS TRULY NEITHER GOOD NOR EVIL HE IS BY DEFINITION NEUTRAL.
YET CLEARLY GALACTUS IS NOT A NEUTRAL BEING. WITH INCREASING FREQUENCY HE FEEDS UPON THE LIFE-ESSENCE OF WHOLE PLANETS, AND SHOULD THOSE PLANETS PROVE TO BE INHABITED HIS EFFECT IS CATASTROPHIC TO SAY THE LEAST.
HOW CAN ANY RATIONAL MAN JUDGE THAT TO BE NEUTRAL?

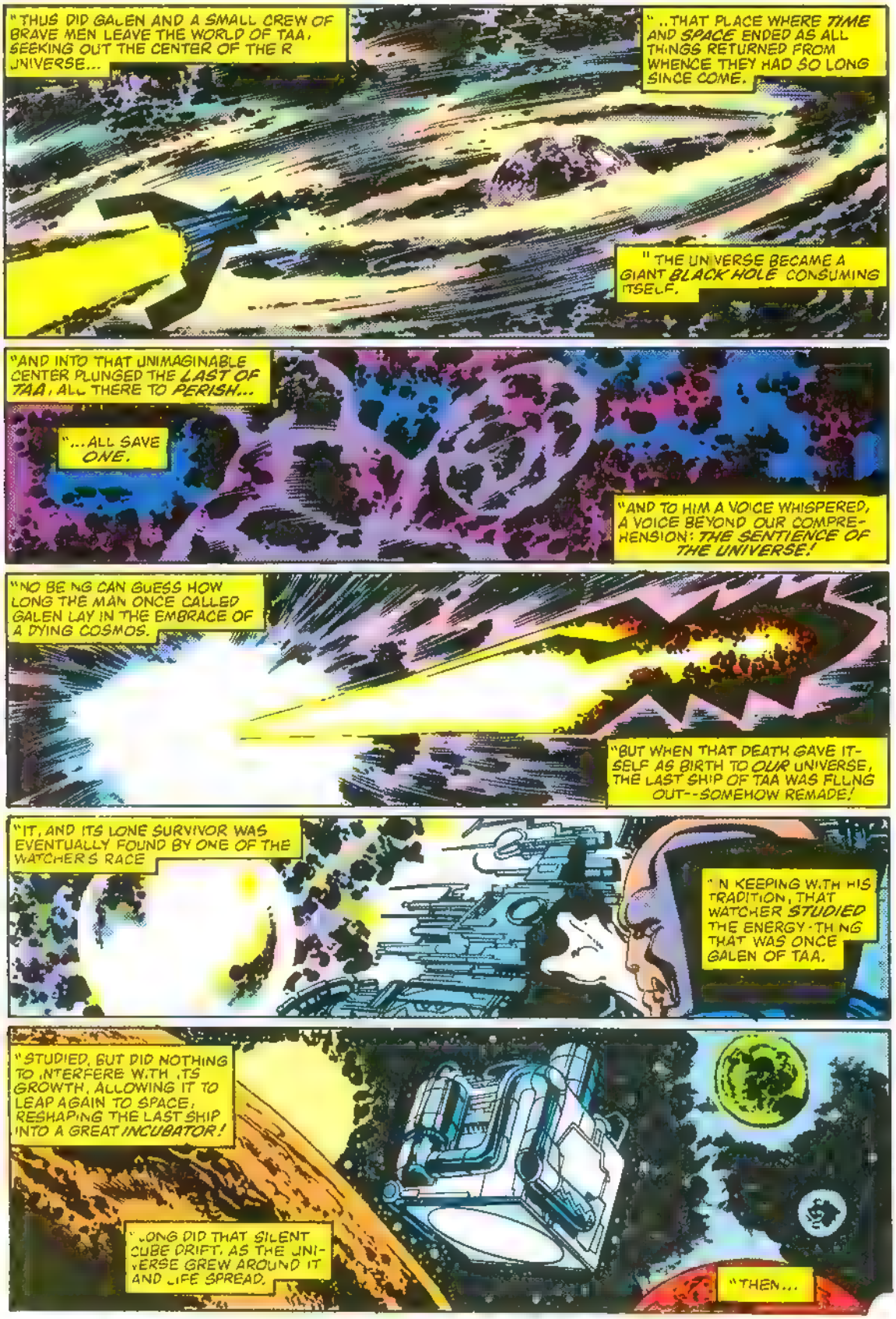

ALBERT EINSTEIN ONCE SAID THAT "GOD DOES NOT PLAY AT DICE." HE MEANT THAT THERE IS AN ORDER OF THINGS IN OUR UN VERSE
AND IT DOES NOT REQUIRE ANY BELIEF IN A SUPREME BEING TO REALIZE THAT GALACTUS MUST SOMEHOW BE PART OF THAT ORDER--AND, I SUSPECT, AN IMPORTANT PART.
FOR IF HE IS TRULY TO BE CONSIDERED NEUTRAL THEN THE APPARENT EVIL OF HIS ACTIONS, MUST, IN THE END RESULT, NOT BE EVIL.
AND SO, THEY MUST BE PART OF SOME GREATER GOOD.
I CANNOT BELIEVE HE WOULD BE ALLOWED TO EXIST, IF THIS WERE NOT THE CASE

IS THAT YOUR DEFENSE, REED RICHARDS? A CHILD'S GAME OF ARITHMETIC?
WHERE THEN IS YOUR PROOF? PROOF THAT THE DEATHS OF UNCOUNTED BILLIONS WORK TOWARD A GREATER GOOD?
ULTIMATELY I HAVE NO PROOF, MAJESTRIX. I HAVE ONLY LOGIC...
...LOGIC AND FAITH.

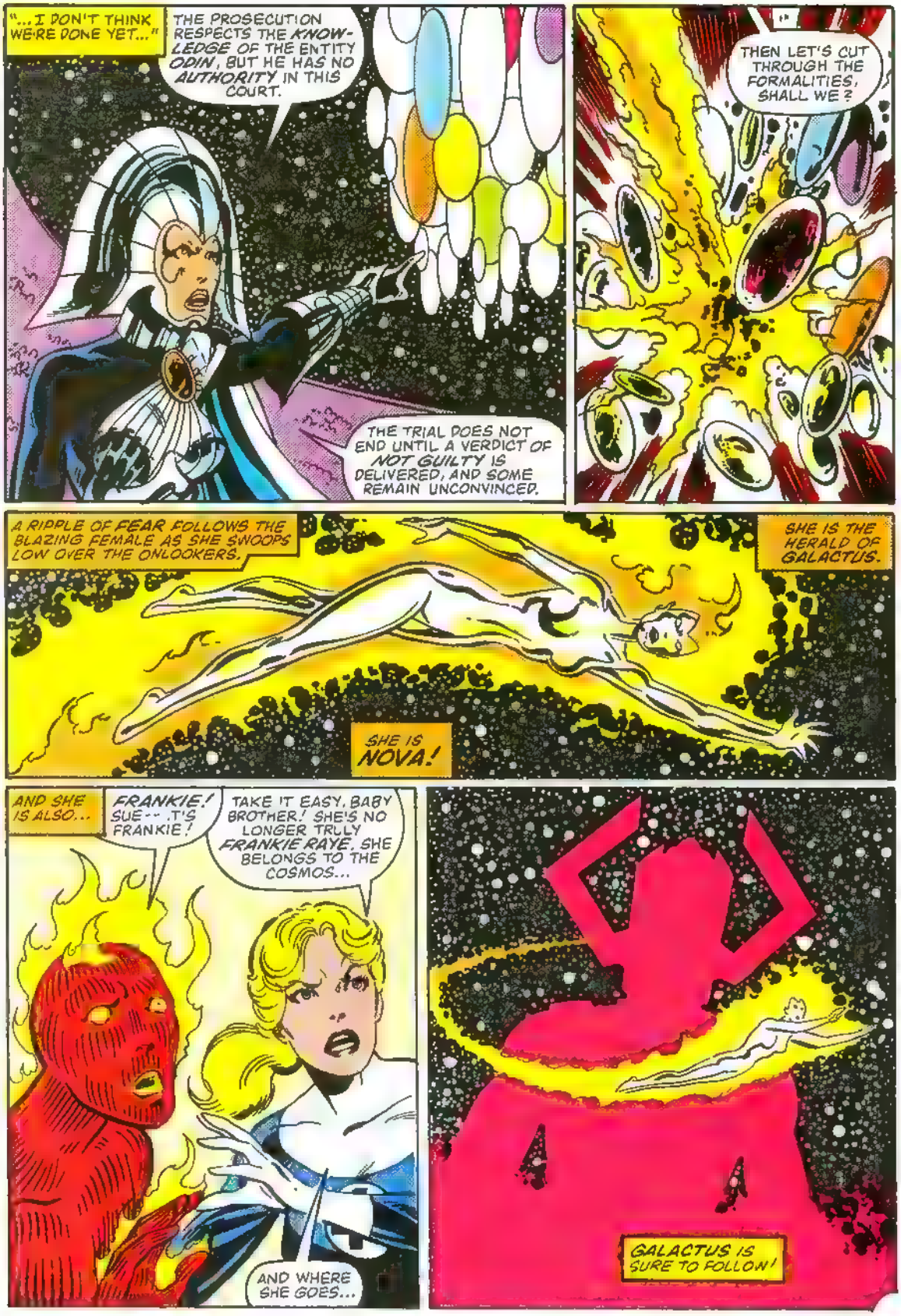

MEASURE NOW THE POWER OF THE INTELLECT OF THIS LONE EARTHMAN, FOR HE HAS REASONED ORDER OUT OF CHAOS.
AND HE HAS REASONED CORRECTLY, AS WILL BE SHOWN WITH THE TESTIMONY OF MY SECOND WITNESS...


"LOOK NOW TO THE CENTER OF THE COURT..."
WATCHER, HE CAME! HE CAME!
AND WOULD HAVE DONE SO E'EN WITHOUT THY PLEA, LAD. THERE ARE MATTERS HERE THAT BE OF GREAT CONCERN TO ODIN!

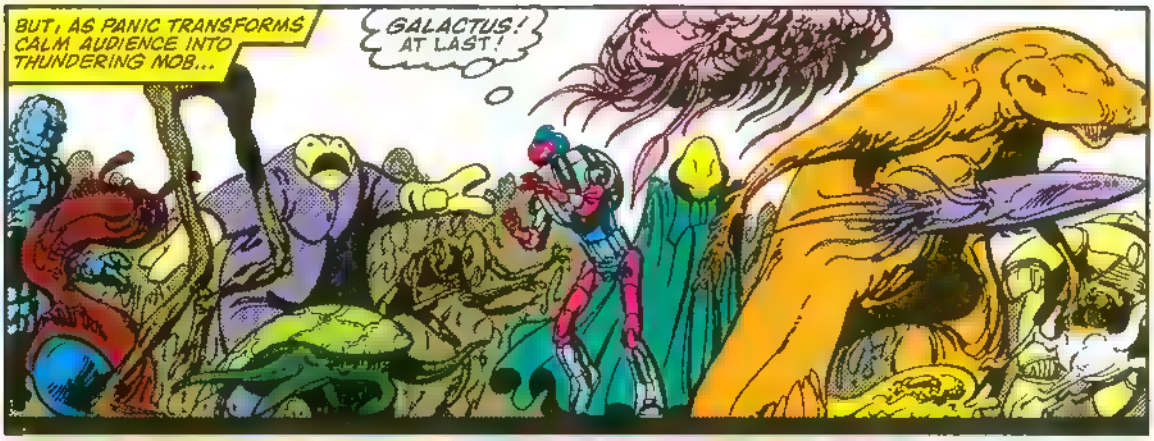
ODIN?! HOLY FRIJOLES! THE WATCHER MUST HAVE SENT THE TORCH TO ASGARD!!!
HE..HE'S SO... IMPOSING! WE'VE ALL MET THOR HALF A DOZEN TIMES...
...BUT SOMEHOW I NEVER MADE THE CONNECTION-- ASGARD! THE ANCIENT NORSE GODS! AND ODIN--THEIR RULER!
AN HE SAID HE WUZ GONNA COME AN' TESTIFY FER REED EVEN IF TH' WATCHER HADN'T ASKED!
REMIND ME TA BE IMPRESSED--WHEN I GET OVER BEIN' FLABBERGASTED!
THIS WITNESS IS, I BELIEVE, KNOWN TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COURT.
HE IS CALLED AS AN EXPERT WITNESS ON THE SUBJECT OF GALACTUS. ARE HIS.. CREDENTIALS ACCEPTABLE TO THE PROSECUTION?
Y-YES...
THEN HEAR THE WORDS OF ODIN, FOR THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF GALACTUS IS KNOWN TO US.
HEAR THESE WORDS, AS GALACTUS H.IMSELF DID SAY THEM UNTO THOR, MY NOBLE SON. AND KNOW ALL THAT THEY BE TRUE!
"ONCE THERE WAS A WORLD, A WORLD OF SUCH MAGNIFICENCE THAT EVEN FABLED ASGARD MIGHT SUFFER IN THE COMPARISON --THE PLANET TAA!
"BUT FOR ALL ITS GLORIES IT WAS A PLANET DOOMED, A PLANET DYING.
"AND IN ALL THAT WORLD ONE MAN ALONE HAD THE WISDOM TO KNOW WHAT IT WAS THAT SO DOOMED THEM, AND THE WORDS TO SPEAK ITS NAME...
THE PLAGUE THAT THREATENS US ALL HAS NO CURE, FOR IT IS THE FINAL PLAGUE OF ENTROPY!
OUR WORLD, OUR VERY UNIVERSE IS GRINDING TO ITS END!
"HIS NAME WAS GALEN, AND THO HE KNEW IT NOT, HE WOULD BECOME GALACTUS!

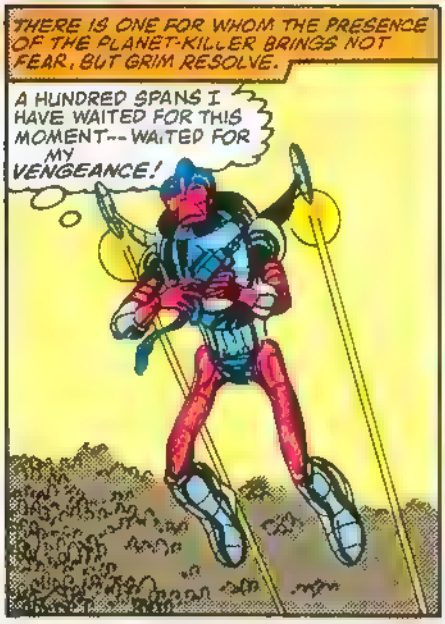

"THUS DID GALEN AND A SMALL CREW OF BRAVE MEN LEAVE THE WORLD OF TAA, SEEKING OUT THE CENTER OF THE R JNIVERSE...
"..THAT PLACE WHERE TIME AND SPACE ENDED AS ALL THINGS RETURNED FROM WHENCE THEY HAD SO LONG SINCE COME.
" THE UNIVERSE BECAME A GIANT BLACK HOLE CONSUMING ITSELF.
"AND INTO THAT UNIMAGINABLE CENTER PLUNGED THE LAST OF TAA, ALL THERE TO PERISH...
"...ALL SAVE ONE.
"AND TO HIM A VOICE WHISPERED, A VOICE BEYOND OUR COMPRE- HENSION: THE SENTIENCE OF THE UNIVERSE!
"NO BE NG CAN GUESS HOW LONG THE MAN ONCE CALLED GALEN LAY IN THE EMBRACE OF A DYING COSMOS.
"BUT WHEN THAT DEATH GAVE IT- SELF AS BIRTH TO OUR UNIVERSE, THE LAST SHIP OF TAA WAS FLUNG OUT--SOMEHOW REMADE!
"IT, AND ITS LONE SURVIVOR WAS EVENTUALLY FOUND BY ONE OF THE WATCHER S RACE
" N KEEPING W.TH HIS TRADITION, THAT WATCHER STUDIED THE ENERGY-TH NG THAT WAS ONCE GALEN OF TAA.
" STUDIED, BUT DID NOTHING TO ,NTERFERE W.TH ,TS GROWTH, ALLOWING IT TO LEAP AGAIN TO SPACE, RESHAPING THE LAST SHIP INTO A GREAT INCUBATOR!
" ONG DID THAT SILENT CUBE DRIFT, AS THE JNI- VERSE GREW AROUND IT AND LIFE SPREAD.
"THEN...

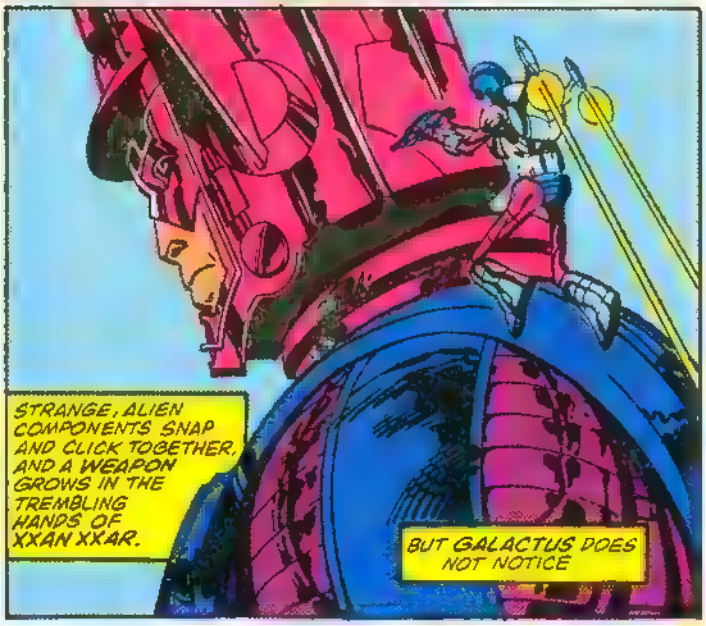
"... THEN CAME THAT FATEFUL DAY WHEN THE CUBE WAS OPENED...
AND GALACTUS LIVED!"
THUS WAS BORN INTO THE NEW UNIVERSE A NEW NATURAL FORCE. LIKE THE SOLAR WIND, LIKE THE SUPER-NOVA...
...LIKE THE ROILING SEAS THAT TESTED OUR VIKING WORSHIPPERS, TESTED THEM, AND MADE THEM STRONG.
SUCH IS THE FUNCTION OF GALACTUS. TO EACH WORLD IN TIME HE COMES AND HIS VERY COMING IS A TEST.
THOSE THAT PASS THE TEST ARE STRENGTHENED BY IT, AND MADE MORE WORTHY OF THAT GREAT FATE WHICH IS THE PROMISED END OF OUR UNIVERSE.
THOSE THAT FAIL FAIL TOTALLY AND ARE FOREVER EXPUNGED WIPED FROM THE SLATE OF TIME AND SPACE
THE ACTIONS OF REED RICHARDS WERE IN NO WAY CRIMINAL. LET THIS TRIAL BE AT AN END! SO SPEAKS ODIN!!
AND AS THE MYSTIC IS NOT RE TO BEAR AWAY THE LORD OF ASGARD...
WA-HOOO! WE DID IT! WE WON!
I KNEW TH BIG BRAIN WOULD GET CLEARED I KNEW IT!
IT IS SO WONDERFUL! IT'S ALMOST TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE!
UMM.. JUST A MINUTE GANG...


"...I DON'T THINK WE'RE DONE YET..."
THE PROSECUTION RESPECTS THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE ENTITY ODIN, BUT HE HAS NO AUTHORITY IN THIS COURT.
THE TRIAL DOES NOT END UNTIL A VERDICT OF NOT GUILTY IS DELIVERED, AND SOME REMAIN UNCONVINCED.
THEN LET'S CUT THROUGH THE FORMALITIES, SHALL WE?
A RIPPLE OF FEAR FOLLOWS THE BLAZING FEMALE AS SHE SWOOPS LOW OVER THE ONLOOKERS.
SHE IS THE HERALD OF GALACTUS.
SHE IS NOVA!
AND SHE IS ALSO...
FRANKIE! SUE--.T'S FRANKIE!
TAKE IT EASY, BABY BROTHER! SHE'S NO LONGER TRULY FRANKIE RAYE. SHE BELONGS TO THE COSMOS...
AND WHERE SHE GOES...
GALACTUS IS SURE TO FOLLOW!

AND IF HIS HERALD BROUGHT FEAR, IMAGINE IF YOU CAN THE TERROR, THE BLIND, UNREASONING PANIC THAT NOW RIPS THROUGH THE ASSEMBLAGE
A MILLION AND MORE ALIEN EYES LOOK UPON HIM WHO IS GALACTUS, AND FOR EACH RACE THE VISION DIFFERS.
FOR GALACTUS IS TRULY NO LONGER A BEING IN THE ABSOLUTE, PHYSICAL SENSE. HE IS AS ODIN NAMED HIM, A FORCE OF NATURE.
AND EACH MIND THAT VIEWS HIM STRUGGLES AS BEST IT CAN TO PERCEIVE THAT UNGUESSABLE FORCE AS AN IMAGE IT CAN COMPREHEND.


BUT, AS PANIC TRANSFORMS CALM AUDIENCE INTO THUNDERING MOB...
GALACTUS! AT LAST!


THERE IS ONE FOR WHOM THE PRESENCE OF THE PLANET-KILLER BRINGS NOT FEAR, BUT GRIM RESOLVE.
A HUNDRED SPANS I HAVE WAITED FOR THIS MOMENT--WAITED FOR MY VENGEANCE!

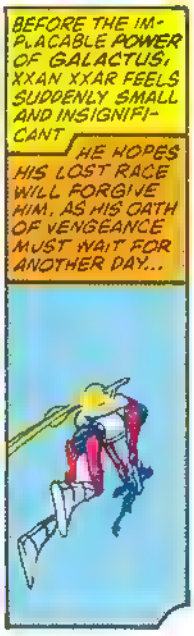

STRANGE, ALIEN COMPONENTS SNAP AND CLICK TOGETHER, AND A WEAPON GROWS IN THE TREMBLING HANDS OF XXAN XXAR.
BUT GALACTUS DOES NOT NOTICE

HE IGNORES ME! HE DOES NOT KNOW HIS DEATH IS IN THIS SMALL WEAPON. FOR IT FIRES A SINGLE TINY PELLET THAT WILL BEGIN A CHAIN REACTION!

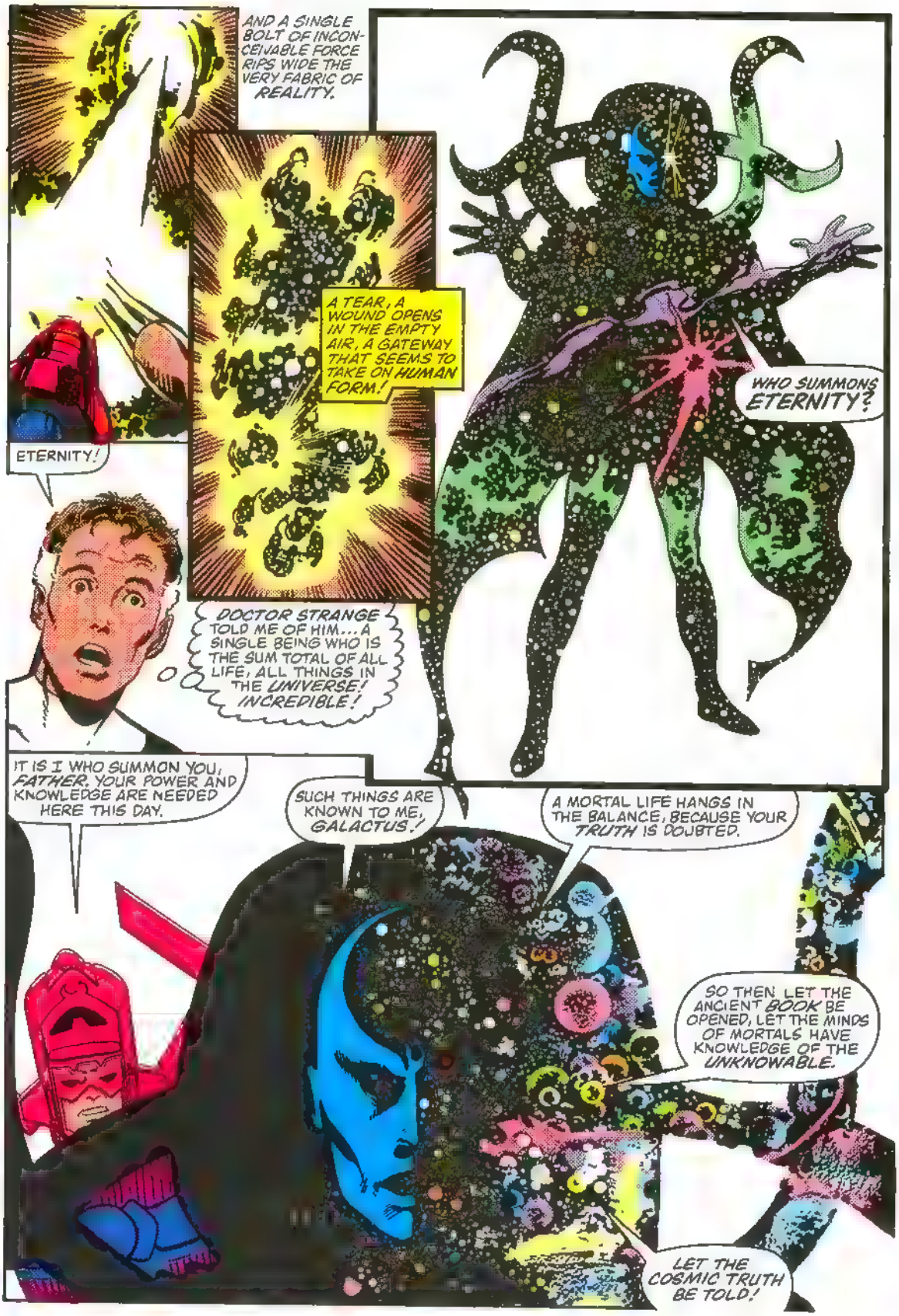
A CHAIN REACTION THAT WILL CONSUME HIS ARMOR, UNLEASHING THE ENERGIES WITHIN, SCATTERING HIS BEING ACROSS A MILLION CUBIC PARSECS.

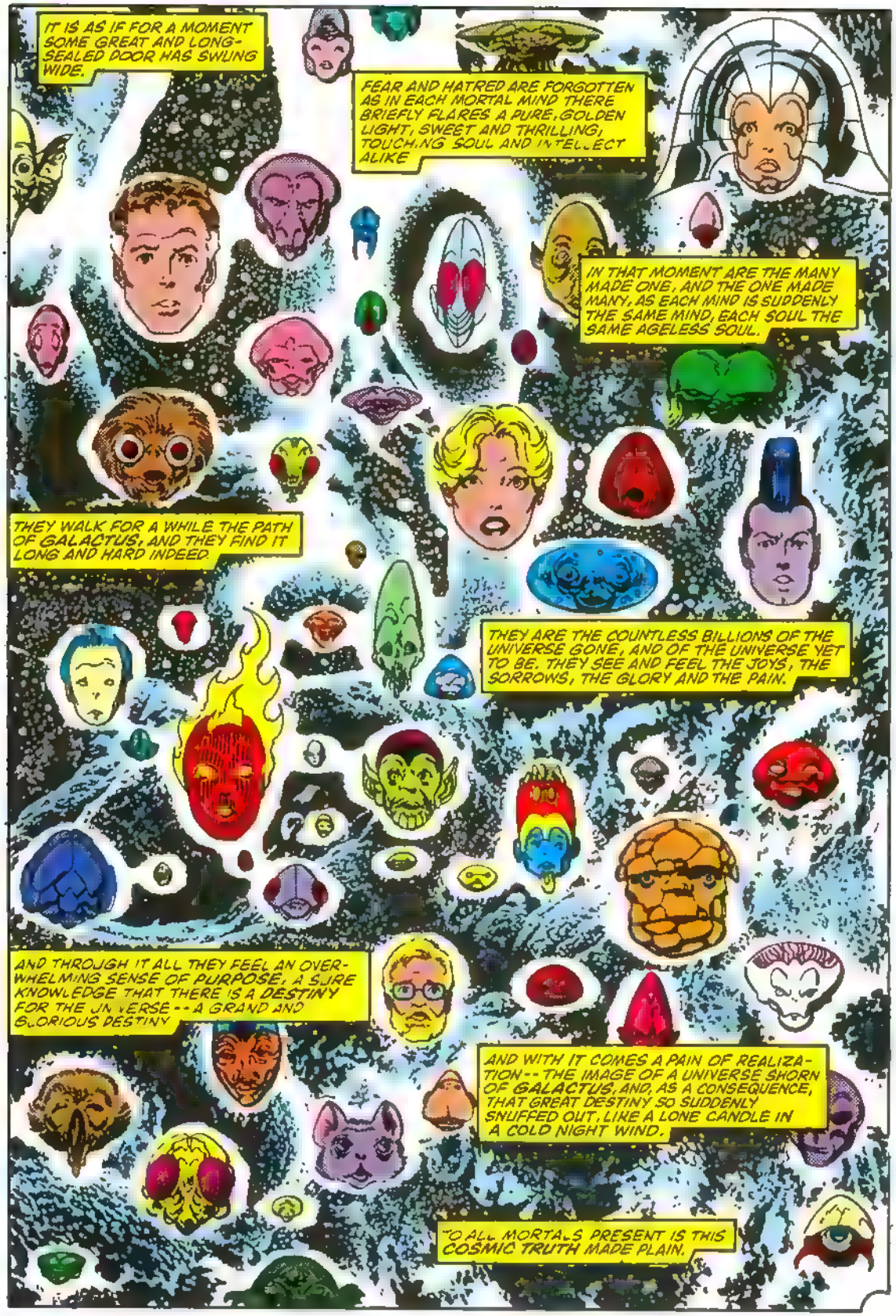
I THINK...
THERE WAS NO WAY TO TEST IT ...AND HE SEEMS SO... SO...
IF IT SHOULD FAIL...

IF IT SHOULD NOT DESTROY HIM... IF IT SHOULD INSTEAD ONLY ANNOY HIM...?
RESOLVE WEAKENS...


BEFORE THE IMPLACABLE POWER OF GALACTUS, XXAN XXAR FEELS SUDDENLY SMALL AND INSIGNIFICANT
HE HOPES HIS LOST RACE WILL FORGIVE HIM, AS HIS OATH OF VENGEANCE MUST WAIT FOR ANOTHER DAY...

AND, NO MORE AWARE OF THIS BRIEF DRAMA THAN IS A MAN OF THE BACTERIA THAT THRIVE ON HIS LIVING FLESH, GALACTUS SPEAKS...
HEAR THE WORDS OF GALACTUS. I BRING NO DOOM TO THOSE GATHERED HERE THIS DAY. I BRING INSTEAD JUSTICE FOR THAT MORTAL I NAME FRIEND.
REED RICHARDS IS A NOBLE SPIRIT, UNTAINTED BY THE PETTINESS OF FEAR AND HATE. HIS DEED WAS HONORABLE AND GOOD.
SO SPEAKS GALACTUS. SO SPEAKS THE COSMIC TRUTH!
MAJESTRIX--HAVE A CARE! I AM SWORN EVER TO PROTECT YOU, BUT AGAINST GALACTUS I HAVE NOT THE POWER!
YET, SUMMONING HER COURAGE, LILANDRA FACES HER GREATEST FEAR.
Y-YOUR WORDS HAVE NO VALUE IN THIS COURT, RAVAGER.
BY NAMING HIM YOUR FRIEND YOU SERVE NOT TO SAVE REED RICHARDS, BUT TO CONDEMN HIM!
YOU ARE KNOWN TO ME, LILANDRA.
BUT I HAVE CONSUMED NO SHI'AR WORLD. WHY TROUBLE YOURSELF IN MATTERS OF NO CONCERN TO YOU?
THE MATTERS HERE CONCERN THE FATE OF ALL LIFE-KIND, GALACTUS.
I AM SWORN PROTECTOR OF ALL THAT LIVES, AGAINST THE LIKES OF YOU.
AND I REJECT YOUR TESTIMONY, UNLESS TO NAME IT A FINAL NAIL IN THE COFFIN OF THE ACCUSED.
I FEAR YOU HAVE DONE MORE ILL THAN GOOD BY YOUR APPEARANCE HERE, GALACTUS.
YET, STILL THERE IS A CHANCE--A CHANCE THAT WE MIGHT PLUCK SALVATION OUT OF HOPELESSNESS.
I KNOW WHEREOF YOU SPEAK, WATCHER. OUR POWER COMBINED MIGHT PEEL AWAY THE VEIL AND BRING HIM TO US!
THEN SO LET IT BE DONE!
THEIR HANDS DRAW NEAR, AND ANCIENT ENERGIES STIR.

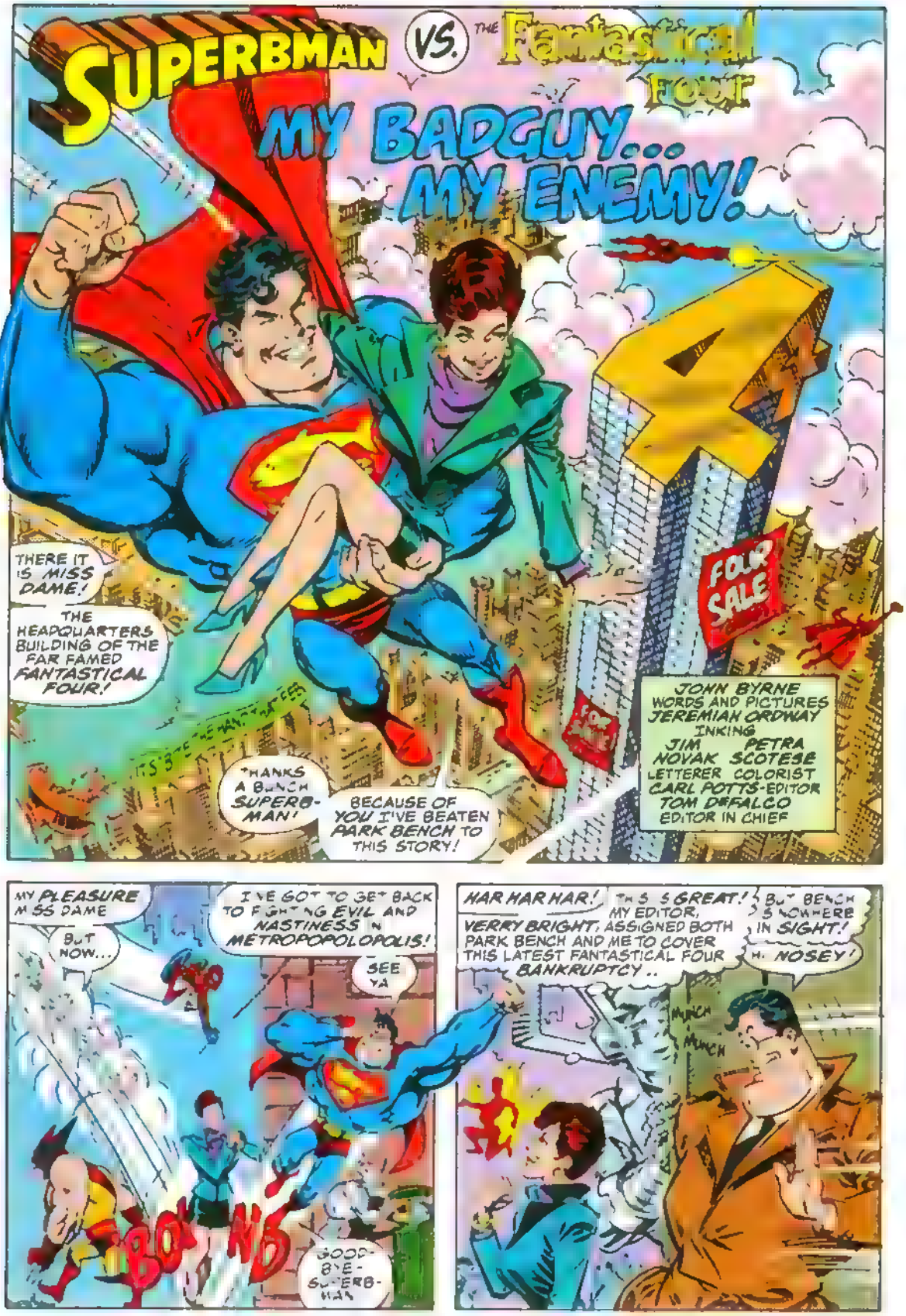

AND A SINGLE BOLT OF INCONCEIVABLE FORCE RIPS WIDE THE VERY FABRIC OF REALITY.
A TEAR, A WOUND OPENS IN THE EMPTY AIR, A GATEWAY THAT SEEMS TO TAKE ON HUMAN FORM!
WHO SUMMONS ETERNITY?
ETERNITY!
DOCTOR STRANGE TOLD ME OF HIM... A SINGLE BEING WHO IS THE SUM TOTAL OF ALL LIFE, ALL THINGS IN THE UNIVERSE! INCREDIBLE!
IT IS I WHO SUMMON YOU, FATHER. YOUR POWER AND KNOWLEDGE ARE NEEDED HERE THIS DAY.
SUCH THINGS ARE KNOWN TO ME, GALACTUS!
A MORTAL LIFE HANGS IN THE BALANCE, BECAUSE YOUR TRUTH IS DOUBTED.
SO THEN LET THE ANCIENT BOOK BE OPENED, LET THE MINDS OF MORTALS HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNKNOWABLE.
LET THE COSMIC TRUTH BE TOLD!


IT IS AS IF FOR A MOMENT SOME GREAT AND LONG-SEALED DOOR HAS SWUNG WIDE.
FEAR AND HATRED ARE FORGOTTEN AS IN EACH MORTAL MIND THERE BRIEFLY FLARES A PURE, GOLDEN LIGHT, SWEET AND THRILLING; TOUCHING SOUL AND INTELLECT ALIKE
IN THAT MOMENT ARE THE MANY MADE ONE, AND THE ONE MADE MANY, AS EACH MIND IS SUDDENLY THE SAME MIND, EACH SOUL THE SAME AGELESS SOUL.
THEY WALK FOR A WHILE THE PATH OF GALACTUS, AND THEY FIND IT LONG AND HARD INDEED.
THEY ARE THE COUNTLESS BILLIONS OF THE UNIVERSE GONE, AND OF THE UNIVERSE YET TO BE. THEY SEE AND FEEL THE JOYS, THE SORROWS, THE GLORY AND THE PAIN.
AND THROUGH IT ALL THEY FEEL AN OVERWHELMING SENSE OF PURPOSE, A SURE KNOWLEDGE THAT THERE IS A DESTINY FOR THE UNIVERSE -- A GRAND AND GLORIOUS DESTINY
AND WITH IT COMES A PAIN OF REALIZATION -- THE IMAGE OF A UNIVERSE SHORN OF GALACTUS, AND, AS A CONSEQUENCE, THAT GREAT DESTINY SO SUDDENLY SNUFFED OUT, LIKE A LONE CANDLE IN A COLD NIGHT WIND.
TO ALL MORTALS PRESENT IS THIS COSMIC TRUTH MADE PLAIN.

THREE HOURS LATER..
... AND THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED, MIKE. ETERNITY MADE EVERYONE... ONE WITH THE UNIVERSE, AND WE ALL JUST KNEW GALACTUS HAD A PLACE IN IT.
LILANDRA--EVERYONE THERE--ACCEPTED THAT REED HAD DONE WHAT HAD TO BE DONE, AND EVERYONE JUST SORT OF... DRIFTED AWAY THE FF AND I WERE SENT BACK TO EARTH
GOSH, JOHN, UH.. MAYBE YOU'VE BEEN INHALING TOO MUCH OF YOUR PENCIL SHAVINGS OR SOMETHING -- THAT'S A WILD STORY!
WELL, JUST GET IT ALL ON PAPER, AND GET IT OFF TO ME ASAP.
THE FF'S FANS ARE GONNA PLOTZ WHEN THEY READ THIS ONE
CRAFT WELL YOUR TALE, JOHN BYRNE, BUT DO SO QUICKLY. ALREADY THE FULL MAJESTY OF THE COSMIC TRUTH IS FADING, FOR NO MORTAL MIND CAN LONG CONTAIN SUCH KNOWLEDGE.
WHAT? YOU MEAN WE'RE ALL GOING TO FORGET? WILL LILANDRA GO AFTER REED AGAIN BECAUSE OF THIS?
NO. ONLY THE ULTIMATE TRUTH WILL FADE. THE CORRECTNESS OF REED RICHARDS ACTIONS SHALL REMAIN UNQUESTIONED.
BUT... WHAT ABOUT GALACTUS, WATCHER? IS HIS TASK ENDED NOW? OR WILL EVERYONE JUST HAVE TO CONTENT THEMSELVES WITH WATCHING HAPPILY THE NEXT TIME HE CONSUMES A WORLD?
TO RENDER THINGS THUS WOULD BE TO ROB LIFE-KIND OF FREE WILL. AND IN ALL THE COSMOS BUT ONE BEING IS DEPRIVED OF THAT FREEDOM: GALACTUS.
THEN, WHAT WILL HAPPEN, WATCHER?
GALACTUS WILL GO ON THE TESTING WILL CONTINUE, UNTIL THAT DISTANT DAY HE FINDS A WORLD WITH POWER ENOUGH TO STOP HIM, TO END FOR ALL TIME HIS COSMIC HUNGER.
ON THAT DAY SHALL GALACTUS PERISH.
ON THAT DAY LET THE UNIVERSE MOURN.

And now for something in a somewhat lighter vein...

The following story, "Superbman vs. the Fantastical Four," originally appreared in issue #2 of Marvel's humor magazine, WHAT THE--?!. In addition to parodying his own work on FANTASTIC FOUR, John Byrne also took a couple of shots at another publisher's character--whose book was, at the time, being written and drawn by none other than John Byrne himself.

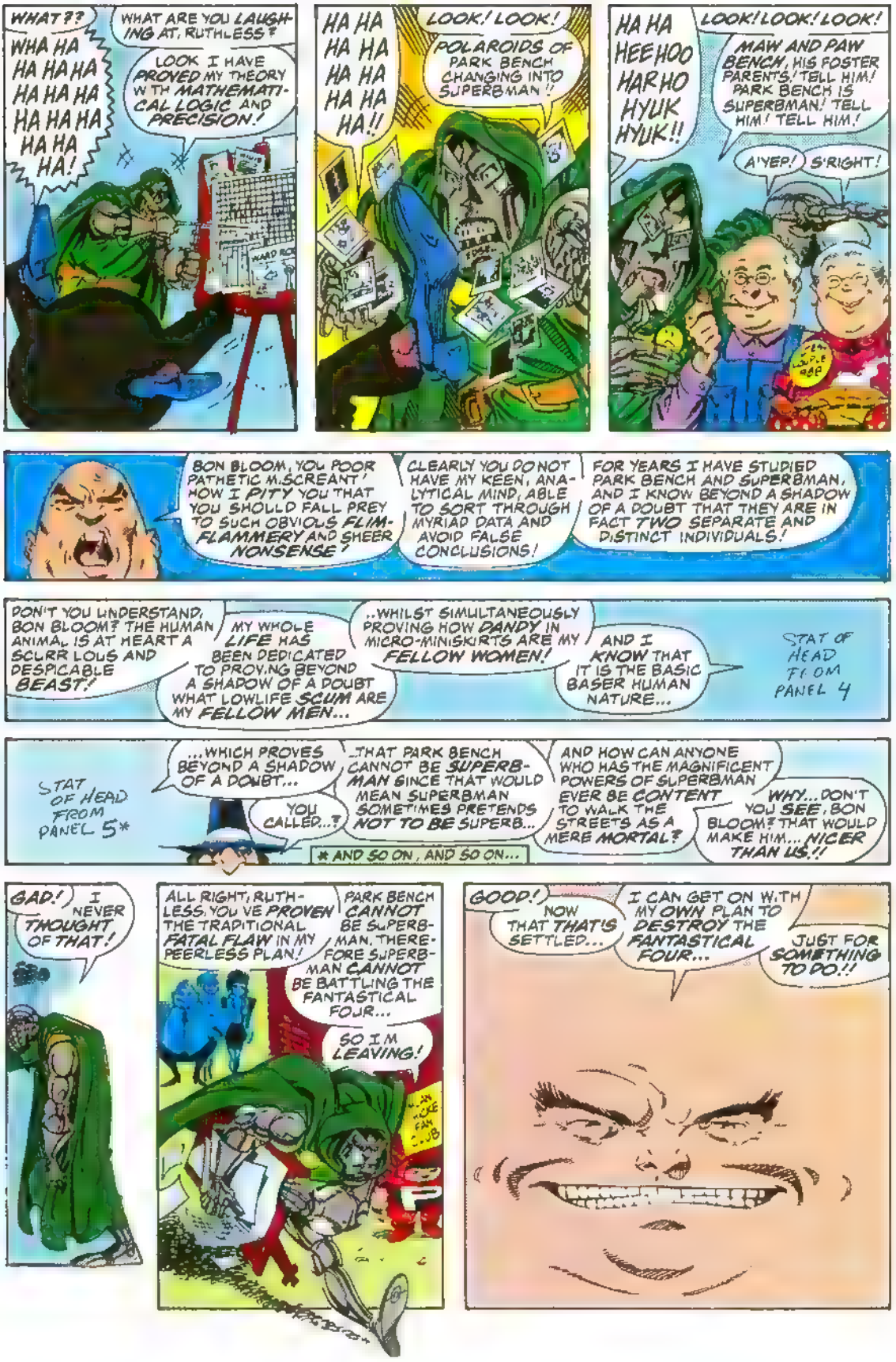

SUPERBMAN VS. THE Fantastical Four
MY BADGUY... MY ENEMY!
THERE IT IS MISS DAME!
THE HEADQUARTERS BUILDING OF THE FAR FAMED FANTASTICAL FOUR!
FOR SALE
JOHN BYRNE WORDS AND PICTURES
JEREMIAH ORDWAY INKING
JIM NOVAK PETRA SCOTESE LETTERER COLORIST
CARL POTTS-EDITOR
TOM DEFALCO EDITOR IN CHIEF
THANKS A BUNCH SUPERB-MAN!
BECAUSE OF YOU I'VE BEATEN PARK BENCH TO THIS STORY!
MY PLEASURE MISS DAME
BUT NOW...
I'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO FIGHTING EVIL AND NASTINESS IN METROPOPOLOPOLIS!
SEE YA
BOUND
GOOD-BYE-SUPERB-MAN
HAR HAR HAR!
THIS IS GREAT! MY EDITOR, VERRY BRIGHT, ASSIGNED BOTH PARK BENCH AND ME TO COVER THIS LATEST FANTASTICAL FOUR BANKRUPTCY..
BUT BENCH IS NOWHERE IN SIGHT!
HI NOSEY!
MUNCH MUNCH

HOLY FLAME RETARDANTS!
THIS IS TERRIBLE!
PARK BENCH!
HOW DID YOU GET HERE?!
A MEETING OF THE SPIDERY-MAN FAN CLUB RIGHT IN FRONT OF FANTASTICAL FOUR HEADQUARTERS!
I BETTER GO RAZZ 'EM, IN KEEPING WITH MY ONGOING BUT FRIENDLY RIVALRY WITH OL' COBWEB-HEAD!
EEK!
THE HEAT FROM HIS FLAME HAS WILTED MY $500 DO!!
HEY! IT'S THE HUMAN SCORCH!
WHAT?!?
...WHILE I FIND HELP!
HIDE YOURSELF IN THIS ALLEY NOSEY
EEP!
MIKE MODOK
SPECIFICALLY SUPERMAN!
IT'S HIGH TIME THAT HUMAN SCORCH GADELY WAS TAUGHT A LESSON IN MANNERS!
PERFECT!
MY MASTER PLAN IS GOING EXACTLY ACCORDING TO MY MASTER PLAN!
SOON THE FANTASTICAL FOUR, AND THEIR ACCURSED LEADER WEED WITCHARDS, WILL BE NO MORE!!
SAY KIDS CAN YOU GUESS THE IDENTITY OF OUR MYSTERY VILLAIN?
BAM!
GUESSWORK IS NOT NECESSARY!
IT IS I!
HE WHO IS THE HE WHO IS CALLED DOCTOR BLOOM!!
VILLAINOUS EX-DENTIST AND SWORN ARCH-FIEND AND ENEMY TO THE FANTASTICAL FOUR!!

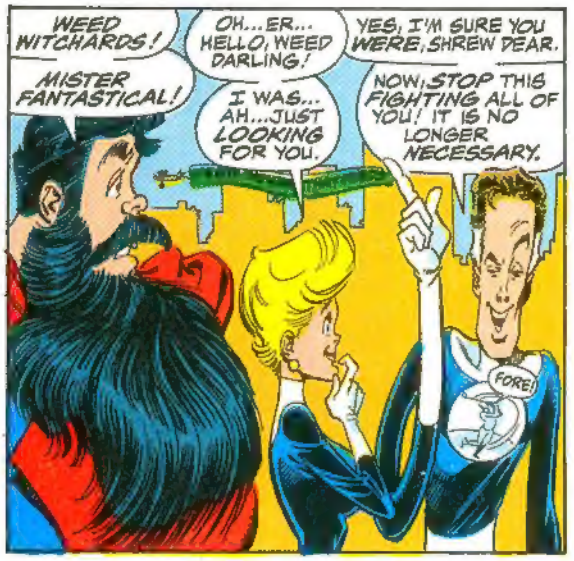
BUT ENOUGH EXPOSITION!
IT IS TIME TO INITIATE PHASE TWENTY-NINE OF MY INFALLIBLE PLAN!!
NOT SO FAST BON BLOOM!
EGAD!
IT IS THE KINPING OF MELORD OF NEW YORK! BUT YOU ARE THE SWORN ARCH-ENEMY OF SCAREDEVIL! WHY ARE YOU HERE?
BECAUSE I AM NOT THE KINPING BON BLOOM
IN REALITY I AM REX RUTHLESS, BILLIONAIRE TYCOON AND SWORN ENEMY OF SUPERBMAN!
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE, YOU TWO
THE KEEPER OF THE COMICS CODE!
THAT'S RIGHT!
AND THERE'S BEEN FAR TOO MUCH SWEARING GOING ON AROUND HERE!
CUT IT OUT OR I'LL SLAP A MATURE LABEL ON THIS BOOK AND YOU'LL ONLY BE READ BY PEOPLE WHO CAN'T GET PLAYBOY AT THEIR 7-ELEVENS!
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
MEANWHILE
HEY! WHAT TH' HECK'S GOING ON AROUND HERE?
THAT'S SUPERBMAN! WHAT'S HE DOIN' WITH MY LI'L BIDDIE BUDDY?
THUNG!
HALP!

OKAY YA MUSCLE-BOUND PRETTY BOY!
LEGGO MY PUNY PAL BEFORE I...
HUH?
WOT GIVES? I THOT YER CAPE WUZ SUPPOSED TA BE INDESTRUCTABIBBLE!
OH, IT USED TO BE BUT I'VE GOT A NEW WRITER, SO NOW ONLY THE STUFF INSIDE MY DOUBLE-TALK BODY AURA IS PROTECTED!
OH YEAH? WELL MAYBE I'LL JUST POKE MY BIG ORANGE MITT IN-SIDE YOUR FUNKY AURA, M
GO AHEAD, THUNG! TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT!
"SORRY BUT THERE'S JUST NO WAY TO WRITE FUNNY THUNG DIALOGUE THAT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE THE REAL THING! -JB-
'KAY
GREAT [illegible] SCOTT
I'D FORGOTTEN I AM ALSO NO LONGER AS POWERFUL AS ONCE'T I WAS!!
THIS CONFRONTATION MAY TAX EVEN MY PEERLESS POWERS

HOWEVER SINCE I'M COMICDOM'S NUMBER ONE GOODGUY, I'M NOT ABOUT TO LET A LITTLE THING LIKE THAT SLOW ME. .
COMING SOON THE BIG 3 and MARVIN
PLEASE HELP-- UNEMPLOYED SUPER EGO
THWIP!
THING!
HEY! WHAT GOES ON HERE!?!
HA HA, SUPERBMAN!
IT'S I, SHREW STORM WITCHARDS, THE INEVITABLE GIRL WOMAN!!
AND MY INEVITABLE FORCE FIELD HAS STOPPED YOU COLD!!
MAYBE... BUT TO MAKE UP FOR MY BEING WEAKER, MY NEW WRITER HAS MADE ME A REAL LADYKILLER!
RESIST ME IF YOU CAN, SHREW BABY!
SMOOCH
HA HA HA HA HA HA!
YOU SEE, REX? MY PLAN IS PERFECTION ITSELF!
PERHAPS, BICKER.. BUT YOU STILL HAVE NOT EXPLAINED TO ME HOW YOU WERE SO SURE YOU COULD BRING SUPERBMAN AND THE FANTASTICAL FOUR INTO COMBAT!
BAH! IT WAS SIMPLICITY ITSELF, ONCE I WAS ABLE TO GET SUPERBMAN INTO A MIGHTY MARVEL MAG!
GOOD GUYS ALWAYS FIGHT EACH OTHER HERE!
BUT HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO BE SURE SUPERBMAN WOULD COME HERE?
DO NOT OVER INFLATE
EVEN SIMPLER! WHEN I HEARD THE FANTASTICAL FOUR WERE BROKE FOR THE 3,748TH TIME I CALLED VERRY BRIGHT ANONYMOUSLY AND SUGGESTED HIS TOP REPORTERS COVER THE STORY
I KNEW HE'D SEND NOSEY DAME AND PARK BENCH, AND, OF COURSE PARK BENCH IS SUPERBMAN!!!
NO STOP


WHAT??
WHA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!
WHAT ARE YOU LAUGHING AT, RUTHLESS?
LOOK I HAVE PROVED MY THEORY W TH MATHEMATICAL LOGIC AND PRECISION!
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!!
LOOK! LOOK!
POLAROIDS OF PARK BENCH CHANGING INTO SUPERBMAN!!
HA HA HEE HOO HAR HO HYUK HYUK!!
LOOK! LOOK! LOOK!
MAW AND PAW BENCH, HIS FOSTER PARENTS, TELL HIM! PARK BENCH IS SUPERBMAN! TELL HIM! TELL HIM!
A'YEP!
S'RIGHT!
BON BLOOM, YOU POOR PATHETIC M.SCREANT! HOW I PITY YOU THAT YOU SHOULD FALL PREY TO SUCH OBVIOUS FLIM-FLAMMERY AND SHEER NONSENSE!
CLEARLY YOU DO NOT HAVE MY KEEN, ANALYTICAL MIND, ABLE TO SORT THROUGH MYRIAD DATA AND AVOID FALSE CONCLUSIONS!
FOR YEARS I HAVE STUDIED PARK BENCH AND SUPERBMAN, AND I KNOW BEYOND A SHADOW OF A DOUBT THAT THEY ARE IN FACT TWO SEPARATE AND DISTINCT INDIVIDUALS!
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND, BON BLOOM? THE HUMAN ANIMAL IS AT HEART A SCURR LOUS AND DESPICABLE BEAST!
MY WHOLE LIFE HAS BEEN DEDICATED TO PROV NG BEYOND A SHADOW OF A DOUBT WHAT LOWLIFE SCUM ARE MY FELLOW MEN...
..WHILST SIMULTANEOUSLY PROVING HOW DANDY IN MICRO-MINISKIRTS ARE MY FELLOW WOMEN!
AND I KNOW THAT IT IS THE BASIC BASER HUMAN NATURE...
STAT OF HEAD FROM PANEL 4
STAT OF HEAD FROM PANEL 5*
...WHICH PROVES BEYOND A SHADOW OF A DOUBT...
YOU CALLED...?
THAT PARK BENCH CANNOT BE SUPERBMAN SINCE THAT WOULD MEAN SUPERBMAN SOMETIMES PRETENDS NOT TO BE SUPERB...
AND HOW CAN ANYONE WHO HAS THE MAGNIFICENT POWERS OF SUPERBMAN EVER BE CONTENT TO WALK THE STREETS AS A MERE MORTAL?
WHY... DON'T YOU SEE, BON BLOOM? THAT WOULD MAKE HIM... NICER THAN US!!
* AND SO ON, AND SO ON...
GAD! I NEVER THOUGHT OF THAT!
ALL RIGHT, RUTHLESS, YOU VE PROVEN THE TRADITIONAL FATAL FLAW IN MY PEERLESS PLAN!
PARK BENCH CANNOT BE SUPERBMAN, THEREFORE SUPERBMAN CANNOT BE BATTLING THE FANTASTICAL FOUR...
SO I'M LEAVING!
GOOD! NOW THAT THAT'S SETTLED...
I CAN GET ON W.TH MY OWN PLAN TO DESTROY THE FANTASTICAL FOUR...
JUST FOR SOMETHING TO DO!!

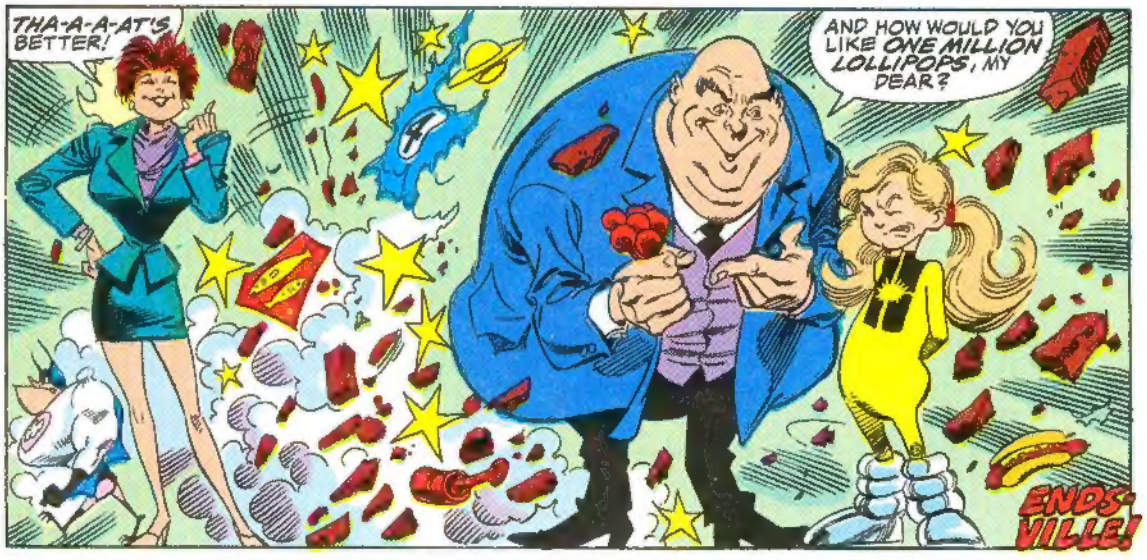
C'MON, SHREW CUTIE, YOU AN' ME COULD MAKE BEAUTIFUL MUZAK TOGETHER...
OH-HH, SUPERBMAN, THIS IS A SIDE OF YOU I NEVER DREAMED EXISTED!
HEY! GET YER PAWS OFF MY SISTER, YA CREEP!!
PFOOSH!
OKAY! THAT DOES IT!
NO MORE MISTER NICE GUY!*
*SEE WHAT I MEAN...?
POW
...EEP...!!
CENSORED
ALL RIGHT, FANTASTICAL FOUR!
YOU MAY HAVE STOLEN AWAY 90% OF MY READERS WITH YOUR COSMIC STORYLINES AND CONSTANT WHINING...
BUT I'M STILL SUPERBMAN...
AND THAT MEANS I CAN BEAT ALL OF YOU WITH BOTH HANDS TIED BEHIND MY BACK AND MY EYES CLOSED AND A REAL BAD HAY FEVER ATTACK AND ALL THE GOOD GUYS AND BAD GUYS IN THE MARVEL UNIVERSE ON YOUR SIDE AND...
STOP!


WEED WITCHARDS!
MISTER FANTASTICAL!
OH...ER... HELLO, WEED DARLING!
I WAS... AH...JUST LOOKING FOR YOU.
YES, I'M SURE YOU WERE, SHREW DEAR.
NOW, STOP THIS FIGHTING ALL OF YOU! IT IS NO LONGER NECESSARY.
FORE!

HUH?
WHY NOT?
BECAUSE I HAVE DETERMINED THAT THE FANTASTICAL FOUR ARE NOT BANKRUPT AFTER ALL!
IT WAS, IN FACT, ALL A RUSE CREATED BY THIS MAN...!!
2²

REX RUTH-LESS!?!
THE SAME!
YOU SEE, RUTHLESS ENVIES MY POSITION AS THE WORLD'S SMARTEST MAN, SO HE BOUGHT THE BANK WHERE WE DO ALL OF OUR BUSINESS, AND ARRANGED THAT WE WOULD NOT GET OUR 1988 CHECKBOOKS, THUS GENERATING THE ILLUSION THAT WE HAD GONE BANKRUPT!
NOW THAT RUTHLESS'S RUTHLESSNESS HAS BEEN REVEALED, HOWEVER, THERE IS NO LONGER ANY REASON FOR US TO FIGHT, IS THERE?

WHADDAYA MEAN NO REASON??
SUPERBMAN, YOU'RE NOT FIGHTING THE FANTASTICAL FOUR BECAUSE OF ANYTHING REX RUTHLESS DID!
YOU'RE FIGHTING THEM BECAUSE THE HUMAN SCORCH WILTED MY DO!
OH, YEAH!!


THA-A-A-AT'S BETTER!
AND HOW WOULD YOU LIKE ONE MILLION LOLLIPOPS, MY DEAR?
ENDS-VILLE!

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Ralph Macchio
April, 1989

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